























“An old soldier formed the central figure of a curious group, eagerly listening to his stories of adventure.”

THE  
Knights of the Cross  
(THE CRUSADERS)

BY  
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"QUO VADIS," "WITH FIRE AND SWORD," "PAN MICHAEL," ETC.

A SPECIAL TRANSLATION  
IN TWO VOLUMES

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## PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.



This translation of "The Knights of the Cross," which is also known in the original as "The Crusaders," has been most carefully made, and the publishers take pleasure in submitting what they consider to be a most faithful presentment of the great work of a master mind. Care has been taken to express the author's meaning in the English idiom, rather than to give an exact literal translation.

The work is published in two volumes, the second of which will be issued immediately on its completion in the original Polish.

STREET & SMITH.



# The Knights of the Cross.

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## BOOK ONE.

### THE CRUSADERS.

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#### CHAPTER I.

In the inn of "The Wild Bull," belonging to the estate of the Abbey in the ancient city of Tinetz, an old soldier formed the central figure of a curious group, eagerly listening to his stories of adventure during his long sojourn in far away lands.

The soldier was of colossal stature, broad shouldered but slender; he wore a long beard and hair done up in a net garbished with glass beads. His leather kuntoush (Polish surcoat) was closely belted by a copper chain, to one side of which a large knife in a heavy sheath was fastened, and a small sabre to the other. At his right sat a lad, similarly attired, with long, wavy curls and the gay expression of a youthful face—probably the old man's companion, or, perhaps, his page.

The rest of the picturesque group consisted of two farmers from the suburbs of Krakow and three townsmen with their red hats, hanging on pegs near them. The proprietor, a German, in a yellow coat, filled the glasses of the company with beer, and attentively listened the while to the soldier's narrative. In this he was rivaled by the townsmen.

In those days the enmity which formed a gulf between the townfolks and the land possessing knights was on the wane, and the former held their heads higher than in the years that followed. Very frequently, therefore, the inns and hostelries were the scenes of feasts, wherein the merchants rubbed shoulders with noblemen. In fact, they were quite welcome if only for the obvious reason that they had the ready cash and were not adverse to spending it for the entertainment of the titleholders.

Time and again the townsmen to whom we have referred, winked at the proprietor to fill the glasses, while

they drew closer around the soldier, as his stories became more and more interesting.

"It seems, noble knight, that you have wandered not a little through this great world of ours?" inquired one of the merchants.

"Not many of those who are now flocking from all sides to Cracow have traveled as far or seen as much," responded the soldier.

"Aye, you have spoken the truth. Great will be the crowd," continued the merchant, "and great the triumph and rejoicings of the kingdom! They say the King has ordered the bedchamber of the Queen to be covered with carpets woven with pearls and precious stones, and to erect over her couch a canopy of unheard-of splendor. And what of the games and military pageants—the world has never seen their like!"

"Friend Hamrot, do not interrupt the knight," said another of the merchants.

"I do not interrupt, friend Eiertreger. I simply conjecture that he will be pleased to learn the facts, as he makes his way toward Cracow. We cannot return there to-night—the gates will be closed—and there is time for everything."

"You have twenty words for one of ours. You are getting old, friend Hamrot."

The old soldier put an end to further disputes. He said:

"Of course, I will remain in Cracow, for I have heard of the various races, and would not mind to try conclusions with some one in the arena. And my nephew here, though he be young and bare of mustache, has seen more than one breast-plate arrayed against him."

The guests scanned the lad. The latter smiled pleasantly, brushed behind his ears the long curls, and brought to his lips the large glass of beer.

The old soldier added: "Yes, and were we willing to return, we would be at a loss to know whither."

"How is that?" asked one of the merchants. "Who are you and whence are you hailing?"

"My name is Matzko, from Bogdanetz, and this is the son of my brother—Zbishko, so called. Our coat-of-arms is a 'blunt horseshoe' from the district of Grada.

"Whereabouts is your so-called Bogdanetz?"

"Oh, you might better ask where it has been, for there is no trace of it now. In the days of the bloody war of the Grimaetos with the Nalenchans, our Bogdanetz was

reduced to ashes, our property plundered, our servants scattered far and wide. There remained to remind us of our former glory only the bare earth. The peasants of the neighborhood hid themselves further and deeper in the woods. Scarcely had we established ourselves again, myself and the father of this youth, when the overflowing of the river ruined us for good. Then my brother died, and left me alone with his orphan. I thought to myself, 'I will not rest idle.' There were rumors afloat at that time about war and about how Yasko, from Olesnitzi, dispatched by King Vladislav from Vilna, with orders for Nicholas of Moscojow, was scouring Poland for knights, bold and fearless. I knew a worthy abbot—Yanko from Toultha—to whom I had mortgaged my lands. I bought ammunition and horses, got ready for the fray, took the boy with me, and off we went as fast as our horses could carry us, to Yasko, from Olesnitzi."

"With this lad here?"

"He was a mere boy then, but strong as a young oak. At his twelfth year he would press his bow to the ground, let go his arrow with a force that would make the Britons we have met under Vilno, open their eyes in amazement."

"Was he as powerful as that?"

"He carried my armor, and when his thirteenth summer came around I gave him my sabre."

"You had plenty of war, I suppose?"

"Thanks to Prince Withold. He established his headquarters with the Crusaders, and every year made flying attacks on Lithuania. His was a queer, picturesque army—Germans, Frenchmen, Britons, the best bowmen in the world, Swissmen and Burgundians. They have made deserts where forests held whispered conversations for ages and ages, they have built useless forts and castles, and finally ruined Lithuania with fire and sword to such an extent that the people who inhabited it were about to leave their old homes and look for new fortunes in the remotest corners of the world, if only far and away from the Germans."

"We heard of it here, that the Lithuanians were about to emigrate, with their wives and children, but we put no faith in the report."

"And I have witnessed it. Oh, if not for Nicholas from Moscojow, if not for Yasko from Olesnitzi, and without undue self-praise, if not for us, Vilna would be a thing of the past."

"We know it. You did not surrender the forts."

"That's just it—we did not surrender! Listen attentively, for I am a man of experience, and know what war means. Our ancestors have called her 'untamable Lithuania,' and it is the truth they have spoken. They fight well, but the knights cannot conquer. When the German horses get stuck in the swamps, when the German knights become lost in the thick forests—then, of course, its different."

"The Germans are brave knights!" exclaimed the townsmen.

"Like yon solid wall they stand in a row, one after the other, all in steel breast-plates, so armored to the very brows, you can hardly see their eyes. They march in the same manner war-like. Time and again the Lithuanians would strike that wall, and be crushed into dust. If not crushed, forthwith, the Germans would do the rest. Not only Germans, but the representatives of various nations are in the ranks of the Crusaders, all bold, brave men. At times one knight will wield his sabre, and as an eagle lights down on a flock of birds, he will attack a whole army, single-handed."

"Holy Mary!" exclaimed Hamrot; "which among them is the bravest?"

"Each in his own way. At the bow the Briton cannot be excelled. He pierces the armor with his arrow and strikes a pigeon a hundred feet away. The Czechs are fiercest with the axes. No one can beat the German in wielding the sabre, but the greatest of all are those that come from France. A Frenchman will grapple with cavalry as well as infantry, chattering the while in an intelligible tongue—a language not unlike the noise made by one leaden plate striking another. Still they are a pious lot. They condemned us as heathens for defending the Saracen, and challenged us to mortal combat. Such a Godly trial will take place shortly, when four of our men will meet theirs, in the presence of Vatzlaw, king of Rome and Czechia."

The curiosity of the little group now reached its highest pitch. All faces turned eagerly toward Matzko from Bogdanetz, and a torrent of questions was poured out:

"Who are the four to represent us? Speak out—be quick!"

Matzko brought the glass to his lips, took a draught and replied:

"I have no fear for them. Yan of Vloshchow, Nicholas

of Washmuntaw, Yasko of Sdakow and Yarosh of Cheshow—all famous knights—giants, forsooth! Spears or sabres, axe or the arrow—nothing is new to them. That will be a sight for honest eyes to look at, for honest ears to listen to. I said before—put your foot on a Frenchman's throat, and he will utter knightly words. So help me God and the holy cross, I believe that the latter will do the talking, and our braves will come out victorious."

But the questioning did not cease.

"Pray tell us all about it! You have given credit to the Germans, you have crowned with fame other knights and told us that they are brave, and have easily conquered Lithuania. But how about yourself? Have they shown the same courage when facing you? How did you fare? Give due praise to our knights."

Evidently Matzko never indulged in self-praise, for he modestly replied:

"Those that have just arrived from foreign lands have shown us a bold front, but having fought us once or twice, they lost their grit, and their hearts grew faint within them. Our people are a sturdy lot. Often we have been condemned for it. 'You laugh at death,' they said, 'and yet protect the Saracen—you shall be condemned forever!' Yet this was false. The King and Queen have baptized the people of Lithuania, and every human being there trusts in the Lord Christ, though not many understand why. It is a fact that even our gracious monarch, when the idol was thrown out from the cathedral, ordered that a candle be lighted before it, and it took the combined arguments of all the abbots to explain to him that this would not do. Why blame, then, the common, ignorant man. More than one has expressed himself thus: 'I was ordered to be baptized, and I was baptized. I have been taught the prayers, and I pray; but why should I begrudge the idols a piece of fried turnip? Why not throw the foam of my beer in their faces? If I do not give credence to this form of idolatry, my horses will perish, my cattle will die, or some other calamity will ruin me.' The superstitious are overawed, being ignorant and in fear of the idols. In the days gone by, a better fate the idols had. They had forests thick and wide, horses in plenty, and ten per cent. of the popular incomes. Now the forests are no more, food is scarce, and in the city the church bells are ringing."

"A wonderful story!" said one of the merchants.

"Many a strange and wonderful thing have I seen in

my day, and the strangest of all are these people of Lithuania. In everything they are unlike the rest of the world. Curly and fair to behold, they never comb their hair or wash their faces. They live on baked turnips, and dream of nothing better. 'It breeds valor,' they say. In their dwellings cattle have the place of honor, married women they value not; young girls they adore and worship, claiming for them a wonderful power: he whom a girl will embrace and rub with her arms will suffer no pain."

"One would not mind to get such pain, if the maiden is fair!" exclaimed Eiertreger.

"To this Zbishko will answer best," said Matzko from Bogdanetz.

Zbishko laughed so vigorously that the chair trembled and swayed beneath him.

"They have charming beauties there," he said. "Was not Ringalla superb?"

"Who is this Ringalla—a charmer, or what?"

"What! have you never heard of Ringalla?"

"Not a word."

"The sister of Prince Withold, the wife of Henryk, Prince Mazowetki."

"What do we hear? Prince Henryk? There was a prince of that name—a bishop, and he died."

"The very same. He expected from Rome the holy commission, but death traveled at a quicker pace. He did not please the Lord very much with his action. Yasko of Olesnitzi sent me with a letter to Prince Withold, when Prince Henryk arrived in Rittersshwerder. At that time Prince Withold grew weary of constant war, for the simple reason that he could not capture Vilna. Our King had little faith in his own brothers. He knew that Withold possessed more brains and courage than any of his own kith or kin. To Withold he sent the bishop, whose mission was to persuade the former to leave the Crusaders, surrender and join his court. The reward was the governorship of Lithuania. Withold always liked changes. He is a giant in strength, and a lover of sport. Their clan is famous for that. Even the girls of their family bend horseshoes with their naked hands without difficulty. Henryk once knocked out, in a hand-to-hand encounter, three knights; at another time, five. The prince received his rewards from the hands of the beautiful Ringalla, and in full armor knelt before her. They became enamored of each other to such an extent that at the



feasts the clergymen pulled him by the sleeve, while her brother Withold kept her in restraint. At last Prince Henryk Masowetzki announced, 'I will give myself the permission, and the Pope, either he of Rome, or of Avignon, will sanction it, but the wedding must be celebrated at once, or the fire of my life will burn itself out.' The desecration was deplorable, but Withold would not prevent it or interfere with the royal ambassador—and they were married. The couple went to Surage, then to Slutsk, disappointing Zbishko greatly, for he, in the German style, had selected Ringalla for the queen of his heart, and proclaimed his allegiance to her to his very death."

"Yes," interrupted Zbishko unexpectedly, "this is true! But later our people murmured that Princess Ringalla rued her hasty action and thought it unworthy of her great fame to be the wife of Henryk, the bishop; for although he married her, he would not resign his episcopal position. She feared the Lord's blessing would never be with such an unholy union, and she poisoned her husband. This act made me regret my vow of allegiance, and a pious hermit, whom I met on the road to Tublin, granted me absolution from my oath."

"He was a hermit, sure enough," laughingly remarked Matzko, "but I have my doubts about his being pious. We came upon him in the woods on Friday, and our hermit was chopping the bones of a newly slain bear, making a sumptuous meal out of their marrow."

"He declared that marrow is not meat, and, besides, he obtained the necessary permission, for after eating marrow, he saw wonderful visions at night, and these visions he interpreted for the laity the whole of next forenoon."

"Well, we will not argue," said Matzko. "Still, the beautiful Ringalla is now a widow, and she may command you to do her bidding."

"It will be useless. I will soon choose another queen of my heart, and be her obedient servant. Later on I will find a wife."

"You must first get a knightly belt."

"That is easy. Will there not be all sorts of combats after the delivery of the Queen? The King will not be apt to begrudge a fellow his belt, then. I will go against the best of the knights. Prince Masowetzki could never have knocked me out were it not that my horse stood on her hind legs at the most critical moment."

"By God!" exclaimed one of the merchants, "a bitter surprise awaits you. Before the Queen the knights will show such prowess as will startle you. There will be Zavisha of Garbow and Farurey, and Dobko of Olesnitz, and Povaland Tatchew, and scores of others. Where do you come in, lad? What avails your boasting? Are you superior to them? How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"The weakest of them will crush you."

"Let the future decide."

"I am told that the King has been generous in his rewards to the knights that have returned from the Lithuanian wars," said Matzko. "You who belong here pray tell me how much truth there is in that?"

"It is true, sir, every word of it. The generosity of the King is known the wide world over; but you will find it rather hard to get to him just now, for Cracow is filled to overflowing with foreign guests. They have all come here for the confinement of the Queen and the christening of the heir apparent. They all vie with each other in showing their respects to our monarch, and their love and esteem for his gracious spouse. The King of Ungay, the Cæsar of Rome, princes of all courts and tongues, will be among the illustrious assemblage. And as to knights and warriors, the city will be full of them, each and every one hoping to return with rich rewards. They say that the holy Pope Bonifacius will grace the occasion with his august presence, and will ask the King's aid against his rival, the Pope of Avignon. It's hard to make your way through such a crowd, but once you fall at the feet of his majesty, your valor is sure to receive proper reward."

"I will fall at his feet, for none has deserved his good will more than we. It's true we have laid up something for a rainy day—there was plunder enough for all, and with the gifts of Prince Withold, it will not be very difficult to keep the wolf away from our castle door. Yet the evening of my life is drawing nigh, and when one is old, and strength leaves his brittle bones, one needs a quiet nook to die in."

The conversation was abruptly ended by loud voices coming through the window, which was open, as the night was fair and warm. From a distance could be heard the clang of weapons, human voices, the neighing of horses, laughter and songs.

The guests of the inn were astounded. The hour was late, and the moon was high up in the clear blue sky.

The host stepped outside, but scarcely had the guests emptied their last glasses, when he hurriedly rushed in, exclaiming:

"A royal retinue is coming!"

In a moment a page, in a pink coat and red hat, opened the door. He stood on the threshold, glanced at the company assembled, and, recognizing the host, commanded:

"Clear the tables and light the fires! Princess Anna Danuta will stay here over night."

With this he turned around and disappeared.

A tumult arose. The host called on his sleeping servants, and the guests looked at each other in surprise.

"The Princess Anna Danuta," said Eiertreger; "she is the wife of Yanoush Mazowetzki. She has been in Cracow for the last two weeks, making a short trip now and then to Zator—the palace of Prince Watzlaw. Probably she is returning from there now."

"Friend Hamrot," said another townsman, "let's go to the barn, and make our beds on the fresh hay. We are not for this society—or, rather, it is not for us."

"I am not astonished that they travel at night," remarked Matzko; "the days are very hot; but why should they stop at an inn when the Abbey is close by?" Then he added as he turned to Zbishko: "She is a sister of Ringalla—do you understand?"

"And of course," Zbishko replied, "she has with her young girls from Mozawetz, as many and as brilliant as yon little shining stars!"



## CHAPTER II.

At that moment the Princess entered the inn—a middle-aged woman, with a kind, smiling face. She wore a red cloak over a green robe, encircled at the waist with a broad golden belt. She was followed by ladies of the court, young and old, with pink and lilac-colored wreathes on their heads and lyres in their hands. Others carried bunches of field flowers, gathered on the road.

The spacious room was immediately filled, as courtiers and noblemen, young lads and half grown maids all belonging to the Princess' suits, entered with shouts of laughter and song. Among the noblemen were two minstrels with lyre and harp, singing historical epics. A

young girl of twelve closely followed the Princess, also carrying a diminutive lyre, adorned with golden trinkets.

"Glory to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!" said the Princess, stopping in the middle of the room.

"Forever and ever. Amen!" responded the others, bowing low.

"Where is the host?"

The German stepped forward and bent his knee, in German fashion.

"We will take a rest here and have some refreshments," said the Princess. "Be quick—we are starving."

The townsmen left, followed by the two farmers.

Matzko and his nephew Zbishko, paid their respects to the noble guests for the second time, announcing their readiness to leave the room if their presence should be undesirable.

But the Princess bade them stay.

"You are noblemen. You can not be in our way. Let us become acquainted with one another. Whence do you hail?"

Once more names, titles, etc., were given and commented upon. Learning about Matzko's return from Lithuania, the Princess joyfully clapped her hands.

"How glad I am to meet you! Tell me about Vilma, of my brother and sister. Does Prince Withold intend to come here for the Queen's delivery and christening of the august child?"

"Such was his desire, but he did not dare. He sent, therefore, guests and courtesies with a silver cradle—his gift to the Queen. On the road this cradle was guarded by myself and my nephew."

"Is the cradle here? I would like to see it. Is it pure silver?"

"Pure and white as snow. But it is not here. They have taken it to Cracow.

"And what, pray, brings you to Tinetz?"

"We are here to pay a visit to our relative, the secretary of the Abbey; also to deliver to the holy fathers what we had the fortune to bring from the war, and the gifts of the Prince.

"The Lord has not forgotten you, then! Was the plunder rich? But, pray, explain why my brother is uncertain about his coming?"

"He is preparing for an attack on Tartars."

"I know it. The Queen does not predict a successful ending, and her predictions are usually verified."

Matzko smiled.

"Our Queen is wise, no doubt a woman of keen judgment, but Prince Withold will be accompanied by a great number of our knights—men of iron, who are hard to conquer."

"Are you not going with them?"

"I was sent with the cradle, and, besides, for five long years I have not taken off my armor," replied Matzko, pointing to the spots and holes left on his leather surtout. "I will rest a while and then plunge anew into the perils of conflict, if not myself, then I will send my nephew Zbishko, with Pan Zbishko of Melshtin. Under his command most of our knights will fight their battles."

Princess Danuta looked at the well-built figure of Zbishko, wished to make some remark, but was prevented by the entrance of a monk from the Abbey, who, after a low bow, mildly reproached her for not sending word to the Abbey about her arrival. He insisted that the Abbey had no lack of room for ordinary travelers, the more so for titled guests, especially for the wife of a prince, whose family had ever been the benefactors of the Abbey.

But the Princess merrily replied:

"We are here merely for a short rest. We return to Cracow in the small hours of morning. We slept soundly all day, and travel at night, for the cool, fresh air it affords. The cocks have crowed their first greeting to dawn, and I did not wish to rouse the holy fathers with such a crowd. My attendants think more of songs and dances than of spiritual rest."

The monk still politely but firmly insisted, but the Princess added:

"No, we will remain here. Time, night songs and merriment, will fly unnoticed; and for the morning prayers we will be with you to begin the day with the Lord."

The monk departed, after blessing the gay crowd, and the Princess called:

"Danusia! Danusia! Climb on that high stool and make our hearts dance with the songs I love so well."

The noblemen quickly surrounded the young girl who had been addressed by the Princess, bringing forward a high chair. The two minstrels sat on either side while the little maiden stood between them with her lyre in her small hands. She was dressed in a pink robe, red slippers with long, narrow tips, and her head was crowned with an odorous wreath of fresh flowers. Stand-

ing on the chair, she seemed a mere child, but as pretty as a cherub, or a marble statue from the cathedral. Evidently it was not her first performance before the Princess and her suite—she was not in the least confused.

"Begin, Danusia!" exclaimed several maidens.

Danusia held her lyre, raised her head, as a bird, ready to sing, closed her eyes, and began in a sweet, silvery voice:

"If God would give me wings,  
As the birds in freedom born,  
I would fly, with heart and soul  
To Yass, in foreign lands forlorn."

The minstrels caught the refrain, accompanying it, one on the harp, the other on the lyre.

The Princess, who doted on worldly songs, gracefully moved her head, as if keeping time, and the little maid sang on with her thin, girlish voice, fresh as the voice of birds in the early spring:

"I would light on a fence  
And sing my humble lay.  
O look, Yassko, look!  
See your orphan 'cross the way."

The minstrels again repeated the words in their strong, manly voices.

Young Zbishko from Bagdanetz, who from childhood was accustomed to the cruelties of war, and had never witnessed such scenes, pushed his neighbor with his elbow and inquired:

"Who is she?"

"She belongs to the Princess' suite. We have plenty of minstrels to amuse and entertain the court, but she excels them all, and the Princess eagerly listens to her songs."

"I am not in the least surprised. She seems to me a veritable angel. I can not tear my eyes away from her. What's her name?"

"Have you not heard of Danusia? Her father, Yurand of Spichow, is the mightiest of knights."

"Verily, I believe human eyes have never looked upon another face like hers."

"She is everybody's pet; everyone is charmed by her songs and beauty."

"And who is her knight?"

"She is but a mere child yet."

Danusia began to sing again and the conversation was ended.

Zbishko looked at her golden hair, on her uplifted head, on the half-closed eyes, on her figure, lighted by the flame of wax candles, and the silvery light of the shining moon, flowing through the open windows, and grew enchanted. It seemed to him, he had seen her before, but forgot where—in dreams or in Cracow, perhaps on the painted windows of the cathedral.

And again he touched the nobleman, and in a low whisper inquired:

"Is she one of your court?"

"Her mother came from Lithuania with Princess Anna Danuta, and the latter married her to Count Yurand of Spiohow. She was a handsome girl, well connected. The Princess cared for her more than for all other ladies in waiting. Therefore she called her daughter Anna Danuta, after the Princess. Five years ago when the Germans attacked us near Zlotorn, she was frightened to death. The Princess then took the child and brought her up. Her father often visits the court, happy to see his only child grow into a wondrous flower—the favorite of the Princess and her household. As soon as he looks at her, however, he sheds bitter tears, thinks of his dearly beloved wife, and returns home to avenge her death on the Germans. He loved his wife with rapturous devotion, such as no one ever before exhibited in the whole land of Magovia, and the number of Germans he has killed will never be known."

The eyes of Zbishko were aflame with a strange fire, the veins on his brow filled with blood.

"So the Germans killed her mother?" he asked.

"They did, and they did not. She died of fright. Five years ago there was peace all around. No one dreamed of war, and no precautions were taken. The Prince went to Zlotorn without an army, only his usual suite, to inspect some forts, when the treacherous Germans made a fierce attack upon us, without declaring war, without cause or reason. . . . The Prince himself, utterly dejected, was led away to prison. A long time the Prince pined away his young life in captivity, until King Vladislav threatened his captors with war. They took fright and set him free. At that time the mother of Danusia died—her heart jumped to her throat and choked the breath out of her."

"Were you with her at that time? Your name, pray."

"Nicholas of Dlugolias. I was with her to the very end. I saw a German with peacock feathers in his helmet make an attempt to fasten her on his saddle, when she grew white as your cloth. I was struck myself with a sabre—that mark on my face tells the tale."

A short pause ensued. Zbishko looked at Danusia, then asked his neighbor:

"You said, she has no knight?"

He did not await a reply, for at the same moment the song was at an end. One of the minstrels, a stout heavily-built man, suddenly arose, upsetting the chair on which the maiden was seated.

Danusia stretched out her hands, but scarcely had she had time to fall when Zbishko flew to her aid and caught her in his arms.

The Princess at first uttered a cry of terror, but afterward laughed merrily and said:

"Here is Danusia's knight! Step nearer, young knight and restore to us our dear nightingale."

Zbishko advanced toward the Princess with Danusia in his arms. With one arm she tenderly embraced him; with the other she held high above her head the lyre, fearing to break it. Her face beamed with joy and was all smiles, although the shadow of fright had not left it.

Approaching the Princess, Zbishko lowered Danusia, knelt down, and, lifting his head, said with unexpected boldness:

"Let it be as you have spoken, gracious lady! It's time for this beautiful maiden to have her knight. It's time for me to have my lady, whose beauty and virtue I will announce everywhere. With your permission I will now make an oath before her, and will remain true to her, no matter what adventures may fall to my lot."

A shadow of surprise and amazement clouded for a moment the Princess' face, caused not so much by Zbishko's words as by the suddenness of their utterance. She rejoiced that her favorite maiden had begun to attract the eyes and attention of brave and impulsive knights. And with a contented and happy countenance she said to her pet:

"Danusia, Danusia! Is it your desire to have a knight?"

In three jumps Danusia was near the Princess. She embraced her neck and cried in such glee as if she was promised something only grown people could amuse themselves with:



"It is! it is!" she exclaimed.

The Princess laughed till the tears streamed down her fair cheeks, and freeing herself from Danusia's caresses, she said to Zbishko:

"Proclaim your oath, youngster! What is your pledge?"

But Zbishko, who through the general hilarity remained solemn and serious, earnestly began, not rising from his knees:

"I swear that on my arriving in Cracow I will hang up on the walls of the hostelry a shield and on it a challenge, written by a skilful monk, which will announce to the world that Danusia is the most beautiful, most virtuous maiden in the world. And whoever dares to contradict it will have to fight me until I perish or come out victorious."

"Very well. Your speech shows that you know the code of knights. And what else?"

"And, having been informed by Nicholas of Dlugolias that the mother of Danusia breathed her last in the presence of a German with peacock feathers on his helmet, I pledge myself to encircle my bare body with a raw cord, which may cut into my flesh, but will not be taken off until I knock off three such helmets from defeated knights, and lay these helmets before the feet of my lady."

"Are you in earnest about it?"

"So help me the Lord Jesus Christ," Zbishko replied.

"I will repeat my oath in church before the priest."

"It is well and praiseworthy to fight the enemies of our race, but I pity you, you are young, and the dangers are many. You may perish."

Matzko was silent during the whole proceedings, but now, he thought, was the proper moment to intervene.

"Do not worry, gracious lady, on his account. Death awaits us all, in the quiet home, on the highway, or on the battlefield; and for the warrior, be he young or old, death on the battlefield is honorable. But war is not unfamiliar to my nephew. Although his years are but few in number, he has fought on horseback, and in infantry regiments, with axes and with spears, with long and short sabre. This is a new and odd fashion which commands the knight to swear allegiance to a lady he meets the first time. I do not blame Zbishko for promising the three German helmets. He has thrashed the Germans

before; let him try it again—his fame will grow all the quicker."

"I see now that we are not dealing with a timid youngster," said the Princess, turning to Danusia. "Take my seat, child; you are now a person of importance. But do not laugh—levity is inopportune."

Danusia took the Princess' seat and tried her best to preserve a serious air, but her eyes were laughing and her little feet danced with joy.

"Give him your gloves," commanded the Princess.

Danusia handed the kneeling Zbishko her gloves. He took them, and, pressing them to his lips, said:

"I will pin them to my shield, and woe to him who will dare to touch them!"

Then he kissed Danusia's right hand and foot and rose.

"Now I await the German dogs! Come one, come all! I am ready for the fray!" he shouted in his strong, manly voice, full of enthusiasm.

At that moment the monk who had addressed the Princess on her arrival, re-entered the inn, followed by two others, carrying straw baskets filled with various viands and wines, hastily arranged. The older monks, after a respectful greeting, reproached the Princess once more for her disregard of the hospitality awaiting her at the Abbey, to which the Princess again vigorously protested.

After an exchange of pleasantries, it was resolved that after early mass the Princess should partake of breakfast and a short rest in the Abbey. The amiable monks extended their friendly invitations to the noble suite, with their ladies, also to Matsko. Zhishko, however knew not of the invitation. He had rushed to his own quarters guarded by servants, to dress himself in gayest attire before presenting himself again before the Princess and Danusia. In a peasant's hut he made his attire as comely as possible, and there, brushing aside his wavy locks, he covered them with a silk net, garnished with amber beads. His white silk coat was trimmed with gold braid. To his gold sash set with precious stones, a small dagger with an ivory handle was fastened. The dagger looked new and shining, and was not in the least bloodstained, although it had been taken off a slain knight who had fought with the Crusaders.

Then Zbishko put on wonderful trousers, one part consisting of red and green stripes, the other of yellow and violet—both ending round the waist in checkered plaits.

Purple-colored boots with long legs made up the rest of his magnificent costume, and thus arrayed, Zbishko, handsome and powerful, entered, he crowded parlor.

His entrance made a strong impression. The Princess was astounded at his manly beauty. Danusia, like a gazelle, flew to Zbishko, as soon as she saw him. But his transformation, and the comments of the surprised courtiers, held her back. She stopped within a yard of Zbishko with dropped eyes and blushing face.

Following her the whole company drew nearer—the Princess' members of her suite, minstrels and monks. The ladies looked at Zbishko as one would look upon a beautiful picture, while Zbishko stood with a faint smile on his youthful face, turning around, now right, now left, conscious of their admiration.

"Who is he?" inquired a monk.

"The nephew of yonder knight," said the Princess, pointing to Matzko. "He has just become the knight of Danusia."

The monks knew of the existence of such a custom and were not surprised at the announcement. Oaths were given at that time even to married ladies, and among the nobility every lady had her knight. This, however, did not put the knight under serious obligations. Thus, to a young girl, such an oath would not necessarily mean the union of the two for life. The lady was not restrained from choosing another man as her husband; and the knight, while constant in his devotion to the lady of his young days in some cases, called another his wife.

What surprised the company most was the assignment of a knight to Danusia, at her youthful age; although in those days girls of thirteen were united in wedlock, and Queen Yadriga, on the day of her arrival from Hungary, could only count fifteen summers.

In the meanwhile, Matzko held the attention of the company by his description of the adventure that resulted in their capturing these costly robes.

"A year and nine months ago," said Matzko, "the Saxon knights invited us for a brief stay with them. Sharing this honor there was also a noble knight from far away Frizian lands, by the sea, with his son, three years the senior of Zbishko. Once at the height of a sumptuous mid-day feast the young knight, proud of the mustache, that adorned his lip, amused himself by ridiculing Zbishko taunting him because of his smooth face, bare of either mustache or beard, and despising his

youthfulness. Zbishko—he is quick-tempered—could not overlook such an insult. Without further ado he caught the fellow's upper lip and pulled the hair out, leaving him a pitiful sight. Thus we came to fight for life and death, freedom or captivity."

"Why do you say 'we?'" asked Nicholas from Dlugolias.

"The father took the son's part, and I, of course, took Zbishko's. We fought, the four of us, in the presence of guests, on a level piece of ground. Our agreement was that to the victors belong the wagons, horses and the servants of the conquered. God has been with us. We vanquished the Frisians, not without difficulty, for they lacked not in manliness and power. The plunder was immense. There were four loaded vans, nine servants, and plenty of ammunition, the like of which one sees not every day. Zbishko's dress is one of those we found among our rich plunder."

Said one of the Cracow noblemen: "I verily believe it now, that Zbishko will get for his fair lady those three German helmets he promised."

Matzko laughed. Indeed there was something in his face that reminded one of the ravenous birds of prey.

The baskets brought by the monks were emptied, and the contents distributed among all present. A rush was made for the tables. The Princess took the seat of honor and commanded Danusia and Zbishko to sit opposite her.

"The occasion demands," she said quite seriously, "that you should both eat from one plate; but," turning to Zbishko, "do not step on her foot under the table, nor touch her knees, as most of the knights would be apt to do. She is too young yet for such lover-like attentions."

"I will respect your commands, gracious lady," Zbishko replied. "Not for two or three years shall I attempt familiarities of that character, certainly not until I fulfill my pledge; and as for stepping on her feet it is out of the question, as they are dancing in the air."

"It is true," said the Princess, smiling. "It is pleasant to find you familiar with good manners."

A silence ensued, caused by the concentration of everybody's attention upon appetizing dishes. Zbishko was busy helping his fair neighbor, who wore a happy, contented smile.

The servants of the Abbey passed around the various wines. The glasses of the knights were large and filled

as soon as emptied; those of the ladies were smaller. But Zbishko's gallantry was demonstrated best when dishes of rare nuts were brought in. The best he cracked for Danusia, refraining from eating them himself, so as not to imitate the greed of others. He even invented a sort of amusement for the little one. He would take the empty shell, carry it in his palm to his mouth and with one strong breath send it flying to the ceiling.

Danusia laughed so heartily that the Princess, fearing for her health, ordered him to stop it; but, seeing her contented face, she inquired:

"And how does my little one like to have a knight of her own?"

"Oh, I am rejoiced!" replied the maiden; and then added, touching his silken coat: "And will he be mine to-morrow?"

"To-morrow and forever, till death parts us!" exclaimed Zbishko.

The supper presently came to an end. The noblemen went off in groups; some were for dancing, others for the songs of the minstrels and Danusia, but the little maiden closed her weary eyes, shook her head now to one side, now to the other. She made a last effort to keep awake, and failing, she trustingly put her head on the shoulder of her knight, and fell asleep, like a tired bird.

"Asleep?" asked the Princess. "Has your dear lady already wearied of your attentions?"

"Perhaps; but she is dearer to me when asleep than the others when dancing," and Zbishko sat erect, for fear of waking the maiden.

But neither the gay jingling of the minstrels' lyre and harp, nor the dancing of the noblemen, with the attendant shouts and laughter of the company could arouse her from her sweet slumber.

She awoke at last with the crowing of the cocks and the ringing of convent bells, calling to early mass.

"We will walk, for the glory of God!" said the Princess, and, taking the aroused Danusia, she first left the inn, followed by the suite, all on foot.

The night paled. In the east a bright sky was seen, pink underneath, greenish above, and under it a narrow golden strip, broadening more and more. In the west the moon was fleeing from the growing light. The latter poured in from all sides. The world was awaking, moist from abundant dew, joyous and strengthened by rest.

"God granted fair weather, but the heat will be dreadful," said a nobleman to the Princess.

"It matters not," responded the knight from Dlugolias; "we will refresh ourselves at the Abbey, and reach Cracow with the twilight."

"In time for another feast?"

"There will be celebrations in plenty there now, every-day, and after the Queen's delivery. Then will come the tournaments of our own and foreign knights."

"We are curious to see how Danusia's knight will distinguish himself."

"Ah! he comes of a mighty race. Have you heard his uncle describe their battle of four?"

"They will probably attach themselves to our court. You see, they are already engaged in earnest council."

Indeed, they were at that moment discussing this very thing. Matzko was not exceedingly pleased with what had occurred during the night. He withdrew from the rest and spoke earnestly to his nephew:

"To be candid, I can see nothing in it for you. I will make my way to the King, some way or another—say with this count, if needs be, and may get something after all. I am just longing for some castle or small town to call my own. But time will show Bogdanetz, wherein our fathers lived and died, must be in our hands again. Yet where will you get the peasants? Those settled by the Abbey will scatter in all directions, and land without serfs is of little value. Now listen, my boy, to what I have to say: Whether you make or you do not make pledges to fair charmers, you will go to Prince Withold, and under his guidance take the field against the savage Tartars. Should war be declared before the Queen's confinement, the knightly tournaments will be by one brave lad poorer. Prince Withold, as you are well aware, is very generous; he pays well for services rendered. With the help of the Saviour, you may capture a number of slaves. The Tartars are as innumerable as yon nest of black ants. In case of victory, one ought to be able to get sixty serfs apiece."

And Matzko, who loved farming, and was of domestic habits, strange as it may sound, began to dream aloud.

"Ah, me! To bring over fifty or sixty men and make a settlement in Bogdanetz! To hew the forests and clean for the plough a nice piece of fat land! How rapidly our name, our resources would rise!"

But Zbishko shook his head.

"These savage Tartars live on horse-meat, and are only fit for slaughter in cruel wars. What do they know of cultivating lands? What use will you make of them in Bogdanetz? And then, have I not solemnly sworn to bring three German helmets to the feet of my lady? Where will I find them among the Tartars?"

"You have made a foolish pledge!"

"And my military and knightly honor, how about that?"

"Remember Ringalla!"

"Ringalla poisoned the Prince, and the hermit granted me absolution."

"The Abbot of Tinetz will do the same service for you now. Your hermit resembled more a highwayman than an abbot."

"I seek not such absolution."

Matzko was silent for a few moments, seemingly enraged. At last he asked:

"And what do you propose?"

"You may go to Withold, for I will remain here."

"You ingrate! Who will speak in my behalf to the King? And are you not sorry for my old bones?"

"It matters little. I have made up my mind not to go!"

"And whither, if I may ask, will my noble knight make his way? Has Bogdanetz lost its place in your heart? Have you no love for the old home? What are you going to plough your lands with?"

"Pshaw! All this talk about Tartars is stupid. Have you heard the Russian's axiom, 'You can catch the Tartar when he lies dead on the battle-field. You will never capture him alive, for no one ever chases the Tartar in the steppes without falling a prey himself.' And what is the plunder, pray? Old rags, and weapons not worth carrying? Better leave those Tartars alone."

Matzko was silent. He knew there was a good deal of truth in Zbishko's words, and after a pause, he apologetically murmured:

"Prince Withold would have rewarded you royally." Then he added: "And, besides, what else is there to claim a brave knight's time and valor?"

"I will go to Yurand of Spichow, the father of Danusia. I have been informed by Nicholas of Dlugolias that Yurand is avenging the death of his wife. I will go to his aid. You have mentioned before that Tartar or German are all welcome in the field of honor. As to the latter,

only the noblest and richest of them wear the helmets I am after. With the helmets go their wearers, with the latter their fortunes."

"I begin to fear, boy, that you are losing your senses. There is no war now, and the Lord knows when there will be one."

"And you are getting old, and weak in your knees, it seems. Peace, indeed! The wolves have patched up their differences with the lambs, and go hungry, rather than break their word! Ha, ha, ha! Is it news to you that the general army rests on its weapons, that the King and the chiefs of the Crusaders have attached to parchment scrolls their signatures, and on the borders blood is flowing freely? For every cow driven away in the dead of night villages are burned, and castles ruined. Serfs and their wines are spured away like so many chickens from a coop. Yurand of Spichow is doing nothing else and on the border there is work in plenty."

For a moment they both stood silent, each busy with his own thoughts. Daylight was now far advanced, and the bright sun-rays fell on the cliffs, on the summit of one of which the Abbey was built.

"The Lord sends his blessings everywhere," finally said Matzko, with softened voice. "Pray to the Saviour."

"It is true. The Lord's grace is omnipotent."

"And think of Bogdantz! You cannot convince me that you are going to Yurand for the sake of the dear old place and not for the little chick——"

"Don't speak of her thus! She is dear to me, it is true, and my pledge is unlike the one I gave to Ringalla. And have you noticed her beauty?"

"What is her beauty to me? You had better marry her as soon as she gets old enough—she is the daughter of a mighty land holder!"

Zbishko's face beamed with a kind, joyous smile as he replied:

"Very probably. No other mistress, no other wife! When your bones grow old you will nurse our grandchildren."

Now Matzko smiled, and, forgetting his previous anger, gayly exclaimed:

"Let it be so. Joy for the old days, blissful rest after death. The name of the Lord be blessed!"



## CHAPTER III.

Princess Danuta, Matzko and Zbishko had visited Tinetz before, but among the Princess' suite there were courtiers to whom the city was a *terra incognita*. Their eyes wandered with amazement from the magnificent Abbey on the summit of the cliffs, the crevated walls enclosing it as an impregnable fort, to the various buildings below, dotting the wide expanse of land, cultivated and fertile. These mighty walls, these fields and gardens stretching far beyond their vision, spoke of riches, unexhausted for ages. On the courtier, coming from ruined and impoverished Mosonia, the sight of such wealth made a sad and painful impression. It is true there were rich Benedictine convents in other parts of the country—in Plotsk, in Greater Poland, in Mogilna, but none superior to the Abbey of Tinetz. Their astonishment increased with every moment.

Meanwhile the Princess, wishing to break the gloomy silence, and entertain the ladies of her court, asked one of the monks to relate the ancient story of the bold Walger.

"Walger's history will be best narrated by Brother Hidulyh. He beheld him in a vision one night," said the monk, pointing to his neighbor, a man well advanced in years, who trotted along with Nicholas of Dlugolias.

"Have you really seen him, pious father?" inquired the Princess.

"I have," gruffly said the monk. "There are moments when the Lord permits him to leave the gulfs of hell and reappear in this our world of sin and temptation."

"How often does that happen?"

The monk looked at his brethren and made no reply. There existed a popular superstition that the spirit of Walger appeared at times when the monks thought more of worldly comfort and luxuries than of work and prayer. Besides, the vision of Walger was considered the forerunner of wars and other calamities.

Brother Hidulph, after a short pause murmured:

"His vision is an evil omen!"

"I never wish to see him," remarked the Princess, making the sign of the cross. "But why is he tortured in hell? I understood he merely avenged an insult."

"Had his life been the acme of morality, he would have been condemned, for he lived in pagan times and was not saved from earthly sin by the holy baptism."

Amid general silence Brother Hidulph continued:

"In pagan days there lived a mighty nobleman, whose strength gained for him the name of Bold Walger. The whole country, as far as human eyes could reach, belonged to him. Beside regiments of infantry, he led a brigade of cavalry, magnificently equipped. His flocks of cattle were numberless, and in Tinetz he had a castle built for his vast treasures, now in the hands of the Crusaders in Malborg. He was a giant, indeed. The mightiest oaks could not withstand his iron grasp; they were broken and shattered to the root, and fell lifeless to the ground. His beauty, his skill in playing the lyre, his powerful yet sweet and enchanting voice, were unrivaled in the whole kingdom.

"Once, while on a friendly visit to the King of France, he caught the eye of the royal Princess Gelgunda, who had been brought up for the convent. He bewitched her with his beauty to such a degree that she eloped with him to his native land. In Tinetz no priest or monk would unite them in holy wedlock. In Wislitz, at that time, Handsome Wislaw, of the royal house of Papel, held his tournament. In the absence of the Bold Walger, he made a fierce attack on Tinetz, reduced its forts and castles, and returned laden with plunder.

"Walger hurriedly collected his army, met and defeated Handsome Wislaw, and brought him back in chains, regardless of the popular belief that no woman ever cast her eyes on Handsome Wislaw without being captivated by his charms, leaving parents, husband and children for his sake.

"Such was the case with Gelgunda. No sooner had she seen Wislaw, than Walger, brave and fearless in war, but crushed by woman's wiles, was soon at the mercy of Wislaw, a prisoner in the latter's castle. But Ringa, the fair sister of Wislaw, heard Walger sing his war hymns in an underground cell of her brother's dungeon. She fell in love with the singer and shattered the fetters that restrained him of his liberty. Walger killed with his sabre both Wislaw and Gelgunda, and with Ringa, his benefactress, returned to Tinetz."

"What wrong had he committed?" inquired the Princess.

"Had he become converted to Christianity, and donated his estates to the Benedictine fathers, the Lord would have forgiven his mortal sins; but as he had not done so, the earth swallowed him."

"Had the Benedictines lived in that kingdom?"

"They had not, for paganism still reigned supreme in the land."

"How, then, could he have been converted, or transferred Tinetz to the monks?"

"He could not, and is, therefore, doomed to eternal tortures," replied the monk, with grave solemnity.

"True! He speaks the truth!" several voices exclaimed.

The Princess and her suite were now approaching the main gates of the Abbey. At the entrance stood the abbot, surrounded by monks and local gentry. The abbot was a tall, well-built man, with a grave, intellectual face. His crown was smoothly shaven, a thin fringe of gray hair covering the back of his head and the temples. A large scar on his forehead, as if made by a sabre cut, reminded one of his youth, of the days of his knighthood. His eyes, proud and searching, glowed keenly from under bushy black eyebrows. He was clad in a cossack, like the rest of the monks, but over it he wore a black mantle trimmed with purple, while a gold chain and cross, set with precious stones, the emblem of his high office, adorned his neck. His whole figure betrayed a proud man, ever commanding and self-confident.

He received the Princess with deep respect. He remembered that her husband was a Masowetz prince, to which race most of the Polish kings trace their origin, as kings Vladislav and Kosimir.

The abbot stepped on the threshold, bent low his gray head, and, having blessed the Princess Anna Danuta and her court with a small golden cross which he held in his right hand, he said:

"Welcome, gracious lady, to the humble abode of the monks! Saint Benedict Nursiski, Saint Mave, Saint Bonifacius and Saint Benedictus. Our patron saints, resting in heavenly peace, shall bless you with health and fortune seven times each day of your life."

"Were we deaf, we could not help hearing the words of such a famous abbot," responded the Princess, with a bow; "the more so that we came for early mass, and are trusting ourselves to your guidance and protection."

She held out her hand, and the abbot, as a finished courtier, knelt and kissed it. Then rising, he led the Princess inside.

Evidently she had been expected. The convent bells were chiming, and the trumpeters at the church gates, blew their horns, monks at various points beat upon immense copper kettles, covered with leather, which made a thundering noise.

On the Princess, born in a pagan land, this reception made a strong impression.

The interior of the church was dimly lighted by the faint rays of the sun coming through the multi-colored windows, and the flame of burning candles.

Immediately the monk at the organ began a quaint melodious hymn, and the powerful tones of the instrument now filled the church with its ringing sounds, then died away in soft and dreamy cadences like the singing of angels, then revived in gradually increasing strains, like the trills of a nightingale, sweet and intoxicating.

The Princess raised her eyes heavenward. On her face an expression of awe and devotion mingled with infinite felicity and to the onlooker she seemed an inspired woman, in a sublime vision contemplating the wonders of heaven.

Thus prayed the daughter of Keistut, born in paganism. With similar reverence prayed the rest of her court.

At times Zbishko would glance at Danusia, who sat beside the Princess with closed eyes, and thought that although it was a proud distinction to be recognized as her knight, yet he gravely realized that the pledges he had made were grave and serious. He had girdled himself with a cord when putting on his new and brilliant attire, but this was only one-half of the pledge. The other half, far more difficult, was yet before him.

And now, when the beer and wine he had drank at dinner had lost their exhilarating effect and left his senses clear, he was terrified at the thought. How could he ever fulfill his pledge? Peace reigned. True, at the daily conflicts on the frontier, it was not impossible to stumble on an armed German, and break his bones, or give up the ghost himself. Thus he argued with Matzko. Then he was somewhat disturbed by the reflection that not every German wore ostrich or peacock feathers on his helmet. From the Crusaders only the princes and counts boasted such decorations. And fearing his inability

to keep the pledges made to Danusia, doubting his own strength, Zbishko began to pray:

"Send us, O Jesus Christ, a war between the Germans and the Crusaders. The Germans are the enemies of Thy kingdom and of all nations that in our tongue bless Thy name. Bless us with victory, and wipe them off the face of the earth, for they serve Satan more than they serve Thyself. And whatever I get from my conquered foes, O Lord, I will give one-tenth to Thy holy church, that Thou mayest know that my pledges come from a pure and guileless heart. Blessed be Thy name, forever and ever. Amen!"

The more Zbishko prayed the more his heart grew light within him, full of reverent humility.

He made another pledge: As soon as he had redeemed Bogdanetz he would donate to the church the entire product of his beehives for one year.

"Of course," he said, "Uncle Matzko will have no objections to such an arrangement, and the Lord God is always pleased with such gifts and to be quicker in possession of them He will come to our aid immediately."

This idea seemed to Zbishko so happy that he regained his former self-confidence. He was certain now that God would hear his prayer, that war would be declared, and if not declared, he, Zbishko, would get his coveted prizes, just the same. His confidence increased, when after mass, and a long rest, he listened at breakfast to the conversation of the abbot with Princess Anna Danuta. The adherents of the Princess, thanks to the generous gifts lavished on them by the Crusaders, were kindly disposed toward the latter. Even the pious Queen Yadviga, when alive, had restrained the hand of her husband, raised against the Crusaders. Anna Danuta, alone, hated them with soul and heart. When the abbot put a question to her about Magovia, she bitterly complained about the Order.

"How can the land fare well with such neighbors as the Crusaders? Regardless of peace having been declared, and, treaties exchanged between apparently friendly ambassadors, our people are molested day and night. On the frontier, whoever seeks slumber, is not certain that he will not awake in chains or with the point of a sabre at his throat, or a burning roof over his head. From traitors there is no protection in oaths, signatures, or parchments. Was it not thus under Zlatir, when, in a time of peace, the Prince was captured without word of warn-

ing? The Crusaders asserted that a fort in process of construction threatened them; but forts are built for defence, and not for attacks. And what prince is there who claims not the right to build and rebuild fortifications on his own land? You cannot pacify the Crusaders, whether you be weak or mighty. The weak they hold in contempt; the strong they endeavor to crush and bring to their feet. Kindness they repay with atrocities. Is there another Order upon which gifts should be lavished in foreign countries, as the Crusaders in the kingdom of Poland? And what was the reward? Hatred, plunder, war and treachery. In vain would be the attempt to demand anything, or to complain about them to the apostles; for in their unlimited pride they would not bow even to the Pope of Rome. True, they have sent ambassadors for the expected celebrations certain to follow the safe delivery of the Queen; but this was only for form's sake. At the bottom lies the fear of the royal displeasure, for the nation's indignation against them for their attacks on Lithuania. In their heart of hearts a base desire still flickers, the evil wish to exterminate the kingdom and the Polish race."

The abbot listened attentively, nodded approvingly, and finally said:

"I know that the commission in Cracow is headed by Thomtur Lichtestein, a knight famous in the Order for his noble name, for his great intellect. You may, most gracious lady, meet him very soon, for he sent word to me that he intends to visit Tinetz and pray before the spring of our saints."

The Princess continued her story of grievances.

"There are rumors of an impending war among the masses—a war of Poland and all races of the same tongue against the Germans. I believe there is a prophecy about this war made by some saint——"

"Brigida," interrupted the abbot. "She was canonized eight years ago. The most reverend Peter from Alvaspug and Motzey from Tinkeping, have taken down her last words, wherein there was something concerning this deadly conflict."

Zbsihko trembled with joy. He could scarcely control himself, and blurted out:

"And how soon will it take place?"

But the abbot, paying more attention to the Princess, did not hear it, or pretended he did not.

The Princess continued. "Our young knights are eager

for war, but the older and more prudent warriors declare, 'We fear not the Germans, though their power and pride be great, nor their horses and sabres; but we dread the Crusaders and their sanctities; against the latter all human prowess amounts to naught.'"

Anna Danuta looked with terror in her eyes at the abbot, and added in a whisper:

"I heard that the Lord's cross is in their possession; how can we fight them?"

"It was sent to them by the king of France," replied the abbot.

Silence ensued, at last Nicholas of Dlugolas, a man experienced in worldly affairs, said:

"I have been in captivity in the Crusaders' camp and have seen one of their magnificent pageants, when this holy emblem was carried on parade. But, beyond this, there are other reverent objects in the convent of Olive, without which the Order would never have reached its present powerful position among nations."

The Benedictine monks turned to him their eager, curious faces, inquiring:

"And what else is there, pray?"

"There is a fragment of the Holy Virgin's dress," replied Nicholas; "there is a book of Mary Magdalena; the right arm of Saint Tiberius; and the bones of various other saints too numerous to name."

"How are you going to fight them?" repeated the Princess, sighing.

The abbot knit his brow. He was silent for a moment, then said:

"It is hard to fight them, because they are monks and wear the holy cross on their mantles; but as they have passed the limit in evil-doing, in sins against Lord and mankind, the holy relics which they consider shields of protection against their foes, will rather work their ruin, because they are ultimately destined, by right of conquest, to come into more Christian hands. The Lord God preserve a Christian land; but if war is declared, our kingdom will bring forward other saintly relics which will inspire its defenders to heroic deeds, and win our battles."

"God grant it be true!" exclaimed Zbishko.

The other monks were also encouraged at these words. The abbot turned to the Princess, and said:

"Trust in God, gracious lady, for the days of the unrepentant are numbered, and meanwhile pray accept this

small ark—in it is preserved the toe of the foot of Saint Ptolomeus and one of our patron saints.

The Princess, trembling with joy and happiness, stretched out her hand, bent her knee, and pressed the box to her lips. Her joy was shared by the noblemen and their fair companions; no one doubted that this gift would bring blessings to all present, and perhaps, to the whole kingdom.

Zbishko, too, felt happy, it seemed to him that war was imminent, and would commence with the end of the Cracow celebrations.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

It was high noon when the Princess, followed by her suite, left hospitable Tinetz for Cracow. The knights of those days, when entering large cities or castles on a visit to friends, were often armed to the teeth. Ancient custom, it is true, ordered them to cast aside their arms after passing the gates. This they were persuaded to do by the owner of the castle, who announced in solemn words: "Lay aside your weapons, noble knights; thou art among friends!"

Nevertheless, a "military" entrance was deemed more "showy" and increased the importance of the visit.

For this display, Matzko as well as Zbishko put on their best armor, taken from Frisian princes—brilliant in their gold and precious stones.

Nicholas of Dlugolias, who knew the world and various nations in it, was an expert in military affairs, and recognized at once the antique make and great value of the shields. He concluded that the Frisians were not a common lot, and his esteem of Matzko and Zbishko grew by the hour. Their horses, too, called forth general exclamations of admiration, and made many a courtier green with envy.

Matzko and Zbishko, sitting gracefully on their high, fancy saddles, looked down condescendingly on the crowd below. Each held a long lance in his hand, and each carried a sabre in his belt, with an axe hanging from the saddle. They followed the carriage, occupied by the Princess and Danusia on one side, and Lady Ofka, the widow of Christine, with Nicholas of Dlugolias on the other.

Danusia was deeply interested in the "iron knights," while the Princess, from time to time, reached for the



box with the holy relic and touched it reverently with her lips.

"I am extremely curious to know what bones there are in it," said the Princess, "but I dare not open the box myself—I may thereby offend the saint. Let the Bishop of Cracow undertake it."

But the cautious Nicholas retorted.

"You had better not part with it even for a moment; it is too precious a gift."

"There is some wisdom in this," said the Princess, and after a moment's meditation she added. "It is long since I have been so much encouraged and made so happy as to-day, by the worthy abbot, by his gift, and his wise words that have dispelled my fears of the relics in possession of the Crusaders."

"His words were indeed wise and true!" said Matzko of Bogdanetz. "They had no lack of relics in Vilna, and, moreover, endeavored to persuade the world that they were attacking pagans. And what was the result? Our knights saw that one need only to spit on his palm, take a good hold of his axe, let it go with force and well aimed and off goes the Crusader's helmet, together with his head. The saints are helpful—it is a sin to deny the fact; but only to the righteous, who are battling for truth and the glory of God. I think, gracious lady, that in case of war, we will conquer the Crusaders, even though they be united with the Germans. Ours is the greater army still, and Jesus Christ will surely come to our aid. And as to relics, have we not, in the convent of the Holy Name, a piece of the Holy Cross?"

"True, I swear it!" exclaimed the Princess; "but our relics remain in convents, while the Crusaders carry theirs along in their wanderings."

"It matter not. There is no difference to the Lord, whether the relics be far or near. Everybody understands that," emphatically remarked Nicholas of Dlugolas. "Rome is far away, yet the Pope rules the world; and who dares question the Lord?"

These words calmed the Princess, and she turned the conversation to Tinetz and its magnificence. The travelers were amazed not only at the costly ornamentation of the Abbey, but at the general wealth and beauty of the country through which they were passing. On all sides they beheld prosperous looking villages, well-kept gardens, vast orchards teeming with fruit trees, dense forests, an abundance of beehives and rich pastures, each

succeeding the other almost as rapidly as in a kaleidoscope. On both sides of the highway they saw cultivated fields green with grain just peeping out, awakened from a long winter's sleep. The wind blew through their golden waves, in the midst of which, like shining stars, were floating the blue heads of flowers, and showy red poppies. And above and over all this the midday sun poured its golden rays and gave the whole scene a delightful, serene aspect.

It was evident that the country was occupied by a numerous, industrious people, in love with the land and its burdensome duties. Wherever the eye could reach, the earth looked not only abundant with this world's goods, but calm, serene and happy.

"This is a royal agricultural district—a land bounteously favored by Nature—a land to live and die in," enthusiastically said the Princess.

"The Lord Jesus Christ is smiling on this land," said Nicholas, "and His blessings bear good fruit. And how can it be otherwise? It is well known that here, when the church bells begin to ring, there is not a nook or corner to which their sweet music does not reach. The evil spirits cannot bear this, and are forced to retreat to the deep woods and the Hungarian borders."

"I thought it strange that Bold Walger, of whom the holy fathers spoke, should be seen in this neighborhood. In Tinotz the church bells ring seven times a day."

This remark confused not a little Nicholas of Dlugolias, and only after several minutes' silent meditation he replied:

"The ways of the Lord are strange—and, besides, mark ye, Bold Walger must get this holy permission every time he makes appearance on earth."

"As 't is, I am glad we did not remain over night in the Abbey. I would have died of fright if he had presented himself to me."

"H'm! 'Tis hard to tell. They say he is very handsome."

"Were he the most beautiful man in the world I would not let him kiss me, as long as he has the odor of brimstone on his lips," said Lady Ofka, petulantly.

"How cautious you are! Even when devils are mentioned, kissing is on your mind."

The Princess and Nicholas both laughed aloud. Danusia joined them, not knowing why. Lady Ofka, enraged, turned her flushed face toward Nicholas, and exclaimed:

"I would prefer to kiss the devil rather than yourself!"

"Pray, don't call the wolf from the thicket," gravely remarked Nicholas. "He often travels and lurks in this neighborhood. Somewhere between Tinetz and Cracow, especially in the small hours of the night. What if he hears your words, and presents himself disguised as a knight?"

"The Lord be with us!" replied Lady Ofka.

At that moment Matzko, who from his high saddle could see for a greater distance than those in the carriage held back his horse and exclaimed:

"Gracious God! What is that?"

"What is the matter?" asked Nicholas.

A knight was seen approaching from the mountains.

"We have invited the devil," murmured the terrified Princess.

Zbishko rose in his stirrups and remarked:

"That's true. It is the Bold Walger—no one else."



## CHAPTER V.

The driver of the Princess' carriage put down his whip, and, still holding the reins, made the sign of the cross. He had noticed the stranger, and his terrified face clearly showed the effect.

The Princess rose to her feet, but presently sat down again, her face pale and haggard. Danusia hid her curly head in the folds of the Princess' dress. The courtiers, their ladies and the various attendants following on horseback, rode forward, confused and astounded, and surrounded the carriage. The noblemen made faint attempts at merriment, and attempted to treat the matter as a huge joke, but their eyes betrayed their fears.

The ladies looked pitiful, and only Nicholas of Dlugolias, who was no novice in adventures, retained his composure. Wishing to quiet and solace the Princess, he said:

"Do not worry, gracious lady. The sun has not set yet, and even were night upon us, Saint Ptolomeus is a worthy match for Walger."

Meanwhile the stranger had reached the summit of a low sloping hill, and halted. He could be clearly seen now in the rays of the setting sun, and, indeed, his gigantic figure seemed to surpass every idea of human

proportions. The distance between him and the Princess could not be more than three hundred yards.

"Why did he stop?" inquired one of the attendants.

"Probably because we are doing the same," replied Matzko.

"He is closely observing us, just as if he were making selections," remarked one of the minstrels. "If I were certain that he is a man, and not a devil, I would approach him and break my lyre on his head."

The ladies drew back in terror, murmuring their prayers. Zbishko, wishing to make a favorable impression on the Princess and Danusa, said:

"I do not fear to meet him. What is Walger to me?"

Danusia burst into tears.

"Zbishko! Zbishko!" she cried.

But, heeding her not, he gave spurs to his horse and away he dashed, confident of his ability to meet and vanquish Walger.

Matzko, though old, was far sighted. Said he:

"He looks to us so gigantic because he stands on an elevation. He is a giant, no doubt, but an ordinary, every-day mortal, like the rest of us. I am off to see that no serious trouble results between these two."

Zbishko, at the same moment, was pondering over the question whether to attack the stranger at once without further ado, or to approach near enough to take a good view of him.

He decided on the latter course, and immediately felt a deep satisfaction, for the nearer he drew to his antagonist the sharper grew his disappointment.

A massively built man sat astride of an enormously large horse, but for this there was nothing else of an extraordinary nature about the man. He was not armed. On his head he wore a red, bell-shaped, satin cap, and was clad in a white linen mantle, from under which his green suit could be seen. His head was raised heavenward, apparently in prayer. Zbishko, therefore, halted.

"Eh, what's Walger to me?" thought the youngster.

He came so near him that he could have touched him with his lance.

The stranger, at the sight of a magnificently-equipped knight, smiled in a friendly way and said:

"The name of Jesus Christ be-blessed!"

"Forever and ever!" responded Zbishko.

"Do I not behold the court of the Mazowetz Princess below?"

"Yes, sir."

"So you are coming from Tinetz?"

There was no response. Zbishko looked around, and the scene which presented itself to his eyes dumfounded him. For a moment he stood like one petrified, not trusting his own eyes. Within a few feet of the stranger he saw several cavalymen, led by a knight in brilliant attire, in a white cloth mantle with a black cross, in steel armor, and a helmet adorned with peacock feathers.

"A Crusader!" murmured Zbishko.

At the sight of the Crusader he thought that his prayer had been heard, that God in his mercy had sent him the German for whose presence he had prayed in Tinetz. He believed that it was his duty to take advantage of this heavenly permission, and, without hesitating a moment, he bent forward on his saddle and with his family yell, "Gradi! Gradi!" like a thunderbolt he rushed upon the Crusader.

The Crusader was somewhat surprised, but did not level his lance, as if doubtful whether the attack was aimed at him.

"Bend your lance!" yelled Zbishko, plunging the iron points of his stirrups into the hips of his horse. "Gradi! Gradi!" was his war cry.

As the distance between them diminished the Crusader became assured that he was about to be attacked. With a quick movement he held out his shield, for Zbishko's lance was at the point of piercing his breast, when some powerful hand suddenly grasped Zbishko's lance, breaking it like a dried reed. The same hand drew the bridle of Zbishko's horse with such force that the animal suddenly became rigid as if planted in the ground.

"Madman! what are you doing?" A deep, stern voice was heard behind him. "Attacking an ambassador, insulting the King?"

Zbishko turned around in his saddle, and saw the same knight who, suspected to be Walger, had frightened the Princess' court.

"Let me go at the German! Who are you?" exclaimed Zbishko, grasping the handle of his axe.

"Drop the axe! I swear to God you will rue it! Drop the axe, or off your horse you go in a moment," threatened the stranger. He turned toward the suite attending the Crusader and called:

"Ho, there! Come here!"

Meanwhile, Matzko was at the scene, his face looking

fierce and troubled. He understood at a glance that Zbishko had acted madly, and that grave results might follow; but he was not averse to joining in the fray. The whole force of the strange knight and the Crusaders, comprised no more than fifteen men partly armed with bows. Two well-armed knights could engage them with reasonable hopes of coming out victorious. Matzko thought that if a trial and conviction awaited them it was best to make their way to freedom through these people and lie low until the storm was over. His face became wrinkled as the face of a wolf ready to plunge his teeth into his prey, and stopping his horse between Zbishko and the stranger, he asked, grasping his sabre:

"Who are you? By what right are you here?"

"By the right of the King, who commanded me to care for the welfare of the ambassador. My name is Powala, from Tatchew."

At these words Matzko and Zbishko looked at the knight, lowered their heads, and put back their swords into their sheaths. Fear had not conquered them. They bowed their heads in respect to a name long famous and well known to them—Powala of Tatchew, a nobleman of an ancient family, a mighty statesman and fearless warrior, the first in the kingdom. Minstrels had proclaimed his fame in their songs, as a model of honor and manliness, and carried it far and wide, coupling his name with the House of Zanisha of Garbow, Skarbka of Gura, Yaska Nanshan and Nicholas of Moscojow. Besides, at this very moment he represented the King, and to attack him meant to put one's head on the executioner's block.

Matzko cooled down, and said in respectful tones:

"Honor and greetings to you, to your fame and manhood!"

"Greetings to you!" replied Powala, "although I would much prefer to form your acquaintance under different circumstances."

"Why so?" asked Matzko.

Powala turned to Zbishko.

"What have you done, young man? On the highway, under the very eye of the King, you have attacked an ambassador. Have you an idea of the punishment that awaits you?"

"He attacked the ambassador, because he is young and stupid. It is easier for him to venture than to consider. Do not judge him harshly till you hear my story," implored Matzko.

"I will not judge him. My duty is to put him in irons."

"How is that?" inquired Matzko, casting gloomy glances at the people surrounding him.

"By the order of the King!"

Deep silence followed.

"He is a nobleman," murmured Matzko, after a short pause.

"Let him swear, on his honor as a knight, that he will appear at the summons of the court."

"I swear!" exclaimed Zbishko.

"'Tis well. What is your name, sir?"

Matzko named his pedigree and described his coat of arms.

"If you belong to the court of the Princess Mazowetz, ask her to plead your cause before the King."

"We are not of her court. We are coming from Lithuania and Prince Withold. It were better we never met any court, for then the lad would not have got into trouble."

Matzko commenced to relate their meeting with the Princess, his nephew's knightly oath; then suddenly becoming enraged against Zbishko, he exclaimed:

"It were better for you had you perished under Vilna. Simpleton, what have you been thinking of?"

"After taking my oath, I prayed to the Lord God to send me more Germans, for the gratification of which request I promised precious gifts. When I espied the peacock feathers and the mantle with the black cross, something within me whispered: 'Go for the German! A miracle has happened; God has sent him to you.' Therefore I attacked him—who would not?"

"Listen," interrupted Powala, "I do not wish you evil. I clearly see now that the lad has acted rather on impulse natural to his age than on a preconceived evil plan. And fain would I prefer not to pay attention to this trivial incident, and proceed on our journey as if nothing occurred to disturb our peace. But I can only do it when the Crusader pledges his word of honor not to lay the matter before the King. Ask him, and implore his forgiveness; mayhap he will have pity on the youth."

"I would sooner face the court than humble myself before a Crusader," exclaimed Zbishko. "It is derogatory to my honor as a knight."

Powala of Tatchew looked at him sternly and said:

"You are wrong. Those who have seen life before you know best what is derogatory and not derogatory to

knightly honor. I was not born yesterday myself, yet I will admit that had I involved myself in such a ridiculous dilemma, I would not be ashamed to beg the pardon of the man I had offended."

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## CHAPTER VI.

Zbishko was confused, and for a short time could find no answer. Looking around, he finally murmured.

"The ground here is quite hard; the removal of a few stones would make it admirable for our purpose. Rather than ask the forgiveness of the German, I would fight him, on horseback or on foot, to death or slavery."

"You rash and stupid lad!" interrupted Matzko. "How dare you challenge an ambassador?" Then turning to Powala, he continued: "Forgive him, noble knight. The lad has completely lost his senses. Much better that he should not address the German; he may make matters worse. I will speak to him myself, humbly bow my old head before him, and entreat him to forgive and forget. And if, after my effort at reconciliation the German will consent to meet me in combat, I will gladly do his bidding. I am always ready for the fray."

"This knight is of a noble, ancient family. I hardly believe he would consent to face you."

"And, pray, why? Have I not the belt and spurs? Princes have met me in tournaments more than once."

"No doubt! But better leave well enough alone. Unless he himself demands a contest, don't mention it. Go now, and God bless you!"

Matzko went toward the Crusader, who sat on his huge horse as still as a carved statue, phlegmatically listening to the animated conversation. Matzko, during the long wars, had managed to master the German language to some extent, and commenced to enlighten the Crusader in his native tongue. He dwelt on the youthful years and quick temper of the boy, who fancied that God had sent to him the knight with peacock feathers; and finally Matzko begged the Crusader to consent to Zbishko's freedom.

The Crusader's face never moved. Erect and motionless, with uplifted head, he looked at Matzko with his cold, steel-like eyes with indifference and contempt as if Matzko was not a knight, not even a human being, but merely some object not worth noticing.



Matzko observed to glance of contempt and although his words were still polite, his soul was fast filling with indignation. He spoke with evident perplexity, and his tanned cheeks were flushed. He seemed to exert himself to the utmost at self-control, and before this human icicle retain his composure.

Powala—his was an honest soul and a kind heart—was a silent observer. He determined to come to Matzko's aid. He remembered that in the days of his youth, when at the courts of the kings of France, Hungary and Burgundia, in search of adventures, which gained for him universal fame, he had learned the German language, and addressed Matzko in a friendly and conciliating tone;

"You perceive that the noble knight is very little disturbed by this absurd affair. Not only in our kingdom, but everywhere, youngsters are not noted for sensible conduct or well-balanced minds. Yet such knights as Thomtur Lichtenstein do not fight children in the arena, nor even in the courts of justice."

The Crusader just named, scanning both of his would-be foes with his icy look, uttered not a word, but proceeded on his way, passing Matzko and Zbishko.

Matzko and his nephew were both wild with rage; they could scarcely restrain themselves, and their hands nervously grasped their swords.

"Wait, cursed beast of a Crusader!" murmured Matzko, through closed teeth. "I have marked you forever, and will find you, dead or alive; after your mission to the King is over."

Powala could not entirely repress his indignation. Said he:

"Leave this to the future. And now let the Princess be your advocate. The lad is in grave danger."

Powala followed the Crusader, stopped him and engaged him in a lively conversation. Both Matzko and Zbishko noticed that the German knight looked with less disdain on Powala, and this enraged them the more.

A moment later Powala rejoined them, gave the Crusader sufficient time to proceed some distance forward, and then said:

"I have tried my best for you, but my efforts have been futile. He declares he will complain to the King unless you are ready to do his bidding."

"What are his demands?"

"I will halt to greet the Masowetz Princess and pay my respects to her court," said the German. "Let the

young man and his uncle follow me, dismount, and, taking off their helmets, kneel to the ground and beg my forgiveness."

Powala closely scanned Zbishko's face and added:

"This is hard for people of noble birth. I understand it too well; yet I must warn you that a refusal to comply with this demand may bring upon you perhaps the headsman's axe."

Zbishko and Matzko stood as if petrified. All were silent.

"Well?" asked Powala, after a prolonged pause.

Zbishko replied calmly with much earnestness, as if the critical situation had added twenty years to his age:

"What can I do? It is all the Lord's will."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that had I two heads, and the executioner were about to use his deadly axe on both of them, I have only one sense of honor, and that honor shall never be disgraced!"

Powala grew serious, and, turning this time to Matzko queried again:

"What have you to say?"

"I will say," gruffly retorted Matzko, "that I have brought the lad up, ever since he could crawl. He is the hope of our family. I am old and feeble, but he cannot kneel and beg pardon, even if death were sure to follow."

His stern face twitched, and suddenly the pent-up love for his nephew took fire within him with such vigor, that he embraced Zbishko with his armor-covered arms, and exclaimed, like a tiger, about to lose his cub.

"Zbishko! Zbishko!"

The young knight was astounded, embraced his uncle with similar tenderness, and said:

"Uncle, I never dreamed you loved me so much!"

"I see you are real knights," said Powala, moved by the scene; "and as long as the lad has pledged his word of honor to be in court when summoned, I will not expose him to harsh indignities. People of your kind may be trusted. Cheer up! The German will pass the whole of to-day in Tinetz. This will give me an opportunity to see the King, before the Crusaders, and I will put matters before his majesty in such a shape that he may be lenient, after all. Happily I succeeded in breaking your lance"—this to Zbishko—"My interference was very fortunate indeed!"

"If death is to be my sentence," said Zbishko, "I would rather die with the thought that I had sold my life dearly, that my lance had touched the Crusader's heart."

"You are fully capable of defending your honor; no one doubts that. But you evidently do not understand that your rash act would bring disgrace to our race," angrily interposed Powala.

"I am well aware of it," said Zbishko, "and this fills my heart with misery."

Powala turned to Matzko. "Take my word of advice, friend," he said. "If this youth, in some miraculous manner is to escape the executioner's axe, you would better put a small hat on him, as they do with hawks, or the youngster will not end his days in a Christian manner."

"He can easily escape that terrible punishment if you keep from the King the report of what has occurred to-day."

"And what of the German? You cannot tie his tongue with a rope!"

"'Tis true, quite true."

They returned to the Princess' court. Powala's servants, who had joined those of Lichtenstein before the fatal incident, now kept close to their master. From afar, out of the sea of quaint Mosawetz headgear, the peacock helmet of the Crusader and his shield, glistening in the sun, could be easily discerned.

"A curious people are these Crusaders," mused Powala, aloud. "When a Crusader is in trouble he is as patient as a Franciscan monk, as obedient as a lamb, meek and sweet as honey—you cannot find his better in the world. But as soon as he feels his star rising, no one can look more majestic—will have less mercy than he. Evidently the Lord Jesus Christ has given them a rock in place of a tender heart. I have observed and studied the people of various nations, and have often witnessed a true knight showing mercy to his weaker comrade, aware that his honor would gain little by conquests of the weak and low prowling in the dust. Yet the Crusader at such moments grows cruel and ferocious. Hold him fast, give him no quarter, or your life is in danger. There is this ambassador; in a moment he demanded not only your apologies, but your disgrace. I hope that neither will ever take place."

"Damn hi m!" cried Zbishko.

## CHAPTER VII.

They approached the Princess' court, and were lost in the crowd. The Crusader, at their approach, took on proud and contemptuous airs, but they never noticed them.

Zbishko, as if nothing had happened to mar his merry mood, in gay tones related to Danusia his proposed plan of capturing the three helmets, and stated that on the summit of the hill, Cracow might be seen in all its magnificence and glory.

Matzko conversed with one of the minstrels, and expressed his admiration for the prowess of Powala, who had snapped Zbishko's lance as if it were a dry reed.

"And why did he break it?" asked the minstrel.

"The youngster rushed on the German, but only in the spirit of fun."

The minstrel, who chanced to be a nobleman and a man of worldly wisdom and experience, thought this joke undignified; but seeing that Matzko treated the matter lightly, he paid no more attention to it.

The present conduct of the old man and his nephew worried and angered the German. He looked now at Zbishko, then at Matzko, and finally understood that they had no intention of dismounting, but, on the contrary, were utterly ignoring him. His look grew sterner, his face darker, and presently he took leave of the Princess.

When he had withdrawn, Powala could not restrain himself, and said, bidding him goodby:

"Proceed boldly, brave knight. The neighborhood is quiet, and no one will attack you, save some stupid youngster."

"Although the customs of your country seem very queer and strange to me, I have sought your company, but not your defence," replied Lichtenstein. "I hope we will meet again at this court, and probably at some other place."

In the last words threats were hidden, and Powala of Tatchew replied:

"It is all in God's will."

He bowed and turned around, then shrugged his shoulders, and said in low voice so that only those close to him could hear:

"The dullord! I could raise you on the sharp point of my sabre and hold you in the air so long that you would have ample time to chant a 'Te Deum.'"

Powala then, with the gallantry of his race, put himself at the services of the Princess, whom he had known for many years.

Anna Danuta questioned him about his mission to Cracow. He answered that by the order of the King he was traveling around the country to maintain order, as great crowds of all sorts of people were making their way to Cracow, and conflicts were not improbable. As an example, he related to her the scene he had just witnessed.

Not wishing to spoil the Princess' good humor, and believing he had plenty of time wherein to enlist the Princess in Zbishko's behalf, he made light of the occurrence, and jokingly described the German's ire, and his own timely interference, and the breaking of Zbishko's lance with one hand.

The Princess seemed merry over Zbishko's haste to get the peacock feathers, while the rest of the suite were loud in their admiration of Powala's strength.

Powala, who was not adverse to bragging now and then, beamed with pleasure and satisfaction, listening to the admiring inquirers, and finally was induced to narrate some of the exploits which had made his name famous in Burgundia and at the court of Philip the Bold.

Once, during a tournament, after the first combat, he seized a Crusader, jerked him out of his saddle, and hurled him in the air, letting him fall on the point of his sabre, although the Crusader was heavily armed, and covered with steel and iron. Philip the Bold was so delighted with this deed of prowess that he presented Powala with a golden chain, and the gift of the duchess was a satin slipper, which he still wore attached to his helmet. Astonishment was on the faces of all assembled, with the exception of Nicholas of Dlugolias, who remarked:

"Men have grown weak. Such knights as were in existence when I was young are no more; nor can one see the kind my father used to narrate of. Now, if a knight chanches to break a piece of armor, or to bend between his fingers an iron hammer, he is at once pronounced a giant,

and his fame travels far and wide. In the days of old there were women who performed such wonders."

"I will not deny that in the days to which you allude men were more powerful than those of the present generation; but there are some strong men at this very moment. Jesus Christ has not refused me great vigor and activity. Yet I do not deem myself superior to most knights in the kingdom. Have you seen Zawisha of Garboff? In strength and deeds of arms he is more than my equal."

"I know him. His shoulders are as broad as the sides of the Cracow bell."

"And Dohko of Olesnitzi? Once at a tournament, arranged by the Crusaders in Turin, he hurled from their saddles twelve mighty knights, to the great glory of himself and our race."

"And our Wazur, Stashko Tzelek stood far above you and all the knights just mentioned. His grasp was like that of a vise. It is said that he would get hold of a fresh branch of a tree, and with his bare hand press it with such force that the wood would yield abundant juice."

"Pshaw! I can do that myself," exclaimed Zbishko. And before any one had time to dare him to prove his words by deeds, he broke a thick sprig off a lone tree, growing by the road; and, facing Danusia, he pressed it in his hand with such extraordinary strength that the juice really began to moisten the dusty ground.

"Ah, Lord God Almighty!" cried Lady Ofka. "What a wonderful feat. Do not go to war, lad. What a pity if you should perish before you take a wife!"

"What a pity!" repeated Matzko, reflectively, and suddenly grew morose.

But Nicholas of Dlugolias laughed aloud and his merriment was echoed by others. Some were profuse in their unstinted praise for Zbishko's prowess, and as an "iron hand" at that period was deemed the acme of merit and virtue. Danusia was heartily congratulated.

The little maid looked happy, though little she knew what it all meant.

For the moment Zbishko forgot the Crusader, and glanced at the assembly with such pride that Nicholas of Dlugolias, wishing to bring the lad to his senses, said:

"It is foolish to boast of your strength, lad. I have heard of more wonderful deeds than that you have just performed. I did not witness what I am about to describe, but at the time of its occurrence my father was at

the court of Charles, the Roman emperor. In full state Charles received King Kozimir with his suite of noble-men, at the head of whom was the giant I spoke of—Stashok Tzelek, the son of Andreas. During a conversation which took place between the two monarchs the Emperor boasted of possessing among his vassals a Czech who was able to strangle a bear to death in the clutch of one of his hands. A performance was duly arranged wherein the Czech strangled two enormous bears, one after the other. Our King grew sad and gloomy. He feared to go home in disgrace, and said:

“Well, my Tzelek will not bow to him. He is more than his equal!”

“It was decided that within three days they should meet in deadly combat. The court was black with people on the day of the conflict, and from all sides noble ladies with their suites poured into the city.

“At length the rival giants faced each other in the arena, and the struggle for life or death began. In twenty minutes the result was hard to predict; but at last Tzelek vanquished the Czech by breaking his spinal column and most of the ribs, and released him half dead from his iron clutch, thus gaining immortality for himself and our King. Since that memorable day Tzelek was called Tomignat. A short time afterward he carried up to the belfry, unassisted, a bell of such enormous dimensions and weight that twenty men could not move it from its place.”

“And how old was he?”

“He was quite young.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

Meanwhile Powala of Tatchew rode on at the right side of the Princess, and bending to her ear, told her the sad truth about the occurrence with the Crusader, and at the same time begged her to assist him in pleading for Zbishko, who might have to pay too dearly for his rash act.

The Princess held Zbishko in high esteem and she listened with much concern to the story.

"The Bishop of Cracow is friendly to me," said Powala; "I may succeed in enlisting his services for his cause, and there is the Queen—she is kind and generous to her obedient servants and friends."

"If the Queen will only take his part, not a hair of his head will be touched," said Anna Danuta. "The King always loved her for her affectionate, pious, loving nature; and since she has redeemed her honor as a woman and the disgrace of sterility is not poisoning her happiest moments, he is the slave of her wishes. But there is in Cracow another woman who basks in his affections—the King's favorite sister, the wife of Prince Zemovit. To interest her in the case I will do my best. She is nearer and dearer to him than I, who am only a cousin."

"The King's love for you is universally known, gracious lady!"

"Yes," murmured the Princess in sad tones, "so it is; but his sister, naturally, has the preference; for me, one link—for her, the whole chain; for me, a fox—for her a sable. No one among his court, among his own family, is so dear to the King as Alexandra."

Thus discussing the affair, and suggesting plans for the defence of Zbishko, they drew near to Cracow. On the road they met more and more pilgrims. From time to time the Princess' suite would run across noblemen, heading numbers of their vassals. Some of the former were clad in armor, and others in light summer attire, and straw hats. Some were on horseback, others occupied antiquated carriages, with their wives and daughters, curious to see the sights advertised all over the



country. In some places the road was blocked by the merchants' heavy vans and carts, all making their way to Cracow. The merchants were forced to pass the city, even if their destination was in another direction, as a certain tax was collected from every merchant found near the city gates.

The carts were laden with salt, bread, fish and wood. Others made their way homeward from Cracow, bringing into rural districts clothing and various city products.

Cracow was now so near that the gardens of the King, noblemen and private citizens surrounding the city proper, were presently in view, also the walls and towers of the numerous convents. The closer the cavalcade approached the city the more the travelers encountered all sorts of people; traffic increased, and at the gates the tumult and jostling were dreadful.

"This is a wonderful city! You cannot find the like of it in the world," said Matzko.

"It always reminds me of a fair," replied one of the minstrels.

"When were you here last?"

"A long time ago, yet I marvel at the scenes just as if I now witnessed them for the first time. Probably because I have just arrived from barbarous countries."

"They say that Cracow has grown wonderfully during the reign of King Yagello.

This was true. When the Prince of Lithuania ascended the throne, the broad and fertile lands of Lithuania and Russia were opened for Cracow's commerce; hence the rapid growth of its population and wealth. Cracow was, therefore, considered one of the richest cities in the world at that time.

"The Crusaders have also some prosperous cities," continued the minstrel. "If we only could get to them, the plunder would be great."

In the meanwhile, Powala's mind was busy with other themes. He thought that young Zbishko, whose only guilt was his quick temper, was unconsciously walking into the wolf's jaws. In the mighty bosom of the knight from Tatchew, cruel and merciless in time of war, there throbbed a dove's heart, and as none knew better than he what fate awaited Zbishko his heart was full of compassion.

"I am still pondering," he said to the Princess, "whether it would be advisable to tell the King of the ac-

cident, or keep silent. If the Crusader will make no complaint, the affair will be dropped then and there; but if he does, is it not best to see the King and warn him, before he is incensed with sudden ire?"

"The Crusader will hardly miss an opportunity to be avenged, if it is in his power," said the Princess. "I will, however, order the lad to enter my suite. The King might be more lenient with one of my noblemen."

She called Zbishko, who, having learned the facts, dismounted, knelt to the Princess' feet and with proud eagerness expressed his desire to be counted among her body-guard, not only for his own sake, but to be near Danusia.

Powala, at the same time, questioned Matzko:

"Where do you intend to make your headquarters?"

"In some hostelry, of course."

"But the hostelries are all crowded. I scarcely believe you will find accommodations."

"Then we will endeavor to hunt up one of our friends, a merchant; he will shelter us for the night."

"Here is my proposal. Be my guests. Your nephew can mingle with the Princess' suite in the palace, but it is best for him to keep out of sight of the King. What the King might do at the first moment of sudden wrath he would not be likely to do when his anger shall have subsided. Besides, you will find it safer to arrange and divide your property, which demands plenty of time. With me you will be comfortable and secure from all evil."

Matzko, frightened a little by Powala's allusion to security, thanked him heartily, and together the three entered the city. Here in the contemplation of the wonders that surrounded them, they soon forgot all fear.

In Lithuania and on the frontier they had only seen castles from a distance; they contrasted the stately edifices now in view with the awkwardly-built habitations of Vilna, now burned and reduced to ruins. Many of the stores in Cracow were far superior to the palace of the high prince of Vilno. It is true, there were in Cracow many wooden houses, but they, too, attracted attention by their neatness and evidently prosperous surroundings. The windows were framed in glittering lead, and when the sun was reflected in them a spectator would imagine that he was contemplating a conflagration. The streets near the market place were lined up with houses of red bricks or of stone, whose tall walls were adorned with crosses. The houses were all situated in close proximity, as a line of soldiers, some wide, others narrow, but all

graceful; and the gates were each ornamented either with a cross or with the image of the holy Mary. Some of the business streets had on either side rich stores filled with costly merchandise, very attractive to the soldier's eyes in time of war and pillage.

Matzko looked on all these sights with glances of envy. But far greater was the surprise of himself and his nephew when they beheld the public edifices; the Church of the Holy Mary on the market place; the town hall with its spacious portico; the exchange for foreign merchants; the building where the public weights were kept; the public baths; breweries filled with mountains of barrels—in one word, on every hand evidences of wealth and prosperity almost dazzling to a stranger.

Powala conducted Matzko and Zbishko to his house, which was situated on the street of Saint Anna, and assigned them a spacious room. Directing his armor bearer to attend to their wants, Powala went to the palace, whence he returned to supper at a late hour. He was accompanied by several friends, who, with wine and songs made the evening pass pleasantly. Matzko and his nephew were delighted, but their host looked alarmed and worried, and, when his friends had finally departed, he said to Matzko:

"I had a chat with a learned monk who is well versed in legal matters. He says that an insult to an envoy is a very grave matter. Pray to the Lord that the Crusader may be induced to withhold his complaint."

This alarming intelligence had a depressing effect upon the two knights, and they went to bed with heavy hearts. Matzko could not close his eyes, and after a short pause called to his nephew:

"Zbishko!"

"Yes, uncle."

"Having considered the matter carefully, I am afraid that you will be unable to save your head."

"You think so?" asked Zbishko, with sleepy voice, and said no more, for he was tired from the long journey.

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## CHAPTER IX.

The next morning Matzko and his nephew, accompanied by Powala, went to early mass in the Cathedral, for the double purpose of witnessing the solemn ceremony and

also to see the court and the guests that had arrived in the palace from various parts of the country. On the road Powala encountered many acquaintances and friends, several of them famous knights, widely known abroad as well as in the kingdom.

Zbishko gazed at them with admiration, promising himself, in his heart of hearts, that if the affair with Lichtenstein was settled in his favor, he would endeavor to rival them in prowess and all possible virtues.

One of those knights, Toportchic, a relative of the Castellán of Cracow, informed them of the home-coming from Rome of Voitzech Yostrejembnik, the scholastic, who had journeyed to Pope Bonifacius IX., with a message from the King, in which the latter invited the Pope to honor Krakow with his presence at the time of the delivery of the Queen. Bonifacius thanked the King for the invitation, but expressed his doubts as to the possibility of his coming personally to Cracow. He therefore sent an envoy plenipotentiary, who, in the name of the Pope, would bless the royal baby at the crib. The Pope also sent the request that as an especial proof of his love for the kingdom the child should be named Bonifacius, or Bonifacia.

The arrival of the Hungarian King Sigumund was a theme of lively conversation, as no one doubted its being an assured fact, for Sigumund never failed to attend the festivities, and tournaments, in which he always participated, wishing to achieve distinction as one of the first knights of his time.

Powala, Zawisha of Garbow, Dobko of Olesnitzi, Nashau, and other knights of equal prowess, recalled with a smile the former visits of King Sigumund, during which their own august lord and master, King Vladislav, begged them not to press his royal visitor too hard—to spare his Hungarian guest, whose vanity, known to the entire world, was so great that the least failure brought tears to his eyes.

But there was one man who occupied the minds of the knights more than all other great men. His name was Prince Withold. Wonderful stories were related of the crib of pure silver which the noblemen and princes of Lithuania had brought to Cracow—the gift of Withold and his wife Anna.

As usual, before the commencement of the services groups were formed in different parts of the Cathedral, and the latest news of the court was discussed. In one of

these groups Matzko, hearing of the silver crib, began to speak of the high value of the gift, and from this passed with enthusiasm to the proposed great expedition of Withold against the Tartars, which undertaking aroused universal interest. The expedition was in fact advancing under the most favorable auspices for the tremendous army was already moving to the east of Russia, and its ultimate success meant the expansion of King Yazello's power over an area covering almost half of the hemisphere, to the very heart of darkest Asia, to the borders of Persia and the shores of the Aral sea.

Matzko, who was one of the closest adherents of Withold, and therefore was in a position to know his intentions and plans, had a knack of narrating them to others so interestingly that he soon became the centre of a vast group, which only dispersed reluctantly when the great bells of the church began to toll.

The whole affair was to be a crusade. Withold himself, though he was known as the Grand Prince, ruled over Lithuania in the name of Yazello, and all honors were due to the latter. The undying glory of such a crusade would illuminate recently converted Lithuania and the untarnished fame of Poland, when the united armies would carry the cross into the lands where the name of the Saviour, if mentioned at all, was profaned and desecrated, where the foot of a Pole or a Lithuanian had never trod before.

The banished Tochtamish would acknowledge himself to be "the son" of Vladislav, and when the Polish and Lithuanian armies placed him again on the throne of his fathers, the throne of Konchok, he would on that glorious occasion accept the teachings of Christianity, together with his entire Golden Horde.

Everybody's attention was riveted on the eloquent Matzko, although many were at sea as to the real object of the crusade, and questions flew fast and numerous.

"Speak clearer, pray. Against whom is the war to be waged?"

"Against whom? Against Timur the Lame," replied Matzko.

Silence followed. True, the knights of the west had often heard the names of the Golden Blue, Azoff, and various others—but the Tartar outbreaks and the civil wars between the numerous hordes and tribes were little known, and therefore possessed no vital interest to the present listeners. On the other side, not a man in Europe

could be found in those days who had not heard of the terrible Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane, whose name was repeated with as much awe and terror as the name of Attila in the olden times. He was, indeed, the "Conqueror of Worlds," the "King of Times," the autocrat of twenty-seven vanquished empires, the ruler of Moscovian Russia, the despot of Siberia, China, the Indies, Bagdad, Ispagani (Spain), Aleppo, Damascus—a tyrant, whose shadow fell over Egypt through the Arabian deserts, over the kingdom of Greece, though the Bosphorus—the man who in awed whispers was spoken of as the "Death of Mankind," the monstrous constructor of pyramids built of human skulls, the victor in all battles small and great, the never vanquished "master of bodies and souls."

Tochtamish had been seated by him on the throne of the Blue and Golden Hordes, and acknowledged as "son." But when his possessions had expanded from Aral to the Crimea, when they overshadowed in greatness the whole of Europe, "the son" resolved to become independent, for which ambition he was dethroned by "one finger" of his terrible "father." The son made his escape, and fled to the ruler of Lithuania, to whom he appealed for assistance. To him Withold planned to return the lost throne. But in order to accomplish this perilous task he had to measure forces with the "world-owning" Timur the Lame."

Therefore his name produced a magically strong impression upon Matzko's audience. After a momentary silence, one of the eldest knights, Kazko of Yaglow, said:

"Yes, this is not a struggle with the first stranger one meets! This is a struggle for life and death."

"Had we only some reasonable justification!" interposed Nicholas of Dlugolias. "But what have we to do with all this? What matters it to us, that in far away lands a Tochtamish, or some other pagan Kursuk, will rule with an iron hand the sons of Belial."

"Tochtamish, if successful, would accept Christianity," replied Powala.

"He might, and he might not. Who would believe in a sor of a dog who does not put his faith in Christ?"

"But it is glorious to die on the battle field for the name of Christ," said Powala.

"And for the fame of knighthood," added Toportchie, the relative of the Castellan. "For are there not many among us who will follow Withold in his crusade? Spitko

of Melshtin has a young wife, yet he is eager to join the prince."

"There is nothing amazing in that," remarked Yasko Nashau; "the blackest sin which lies like a stone on the human heart shall be forgiven to the man who takes part in a holy war like this."

"And the glory will live for ages and ages," commented Powala of Tachew. "If there be war let it be! And if it is war with a powerful foe, so much the better. Timur conquered the world, and is now ruler of seven-and-twenty empires. What fame for our nation were we fortunate enough to wipe him off the face of the earth!"

"And why not?" exclaimed Toportchie. "Had he been the conqueror of a hundred kingdoms, let others tremble, not we! You are right! Give us ten thousand distinguished knights, and the universe will be at our feet."

"What nation is there in this world to conquer Timur the Lame, if not ours?"

"Thus passed the time in animated conversation among the enthusiastic knights, and Zbishko, listening in silence to all their remarks, wondered at himself that never before had he possessed the desire to follow Withold into the wild steppes. Since his prolonged stay in Vilna he had always yearned to see Cracow and the court, to participate in the knightly tournaments, and now, thought he, with bitterness, dishonor, trial and conviction might fall to his lot, while there in Wilno, with the braves of the Prince, at the worst, a glorious death awaited him. But the centenarian Kazko of Yaglow, whose head shook from old age, whose gravity suited his age, poured over the inspired knights a bucketful of cold water, when he said:

"Fools! Do you not know, had none of you heard, that the holy image of Christ has been revealed to the Queen? And if the Saviour Himself admits her to such intimacy, why should the Holy Spirit, which is the third person in the Holy Trinity, be less favorable to her? She foresees the future, and its pages are open to her, as if everything occurred before her, and she said——" Here he halted for a moment, shook his head, and resumed, "I forget what she said, but I will recall it directly."

And he began to delve in his memory, while the knight waited patiently, for all knew that the Queen was gifted with the faculty of penetrating the mysteries of the future.

"Aha!" said he at length, "I remember it. The Queen

said that if the whole of our kingdom went with Prince Withold against Timur the lame, the entire power of paganism would be crushed. But this is improbable, because of the lack of piety among the Christian rulers. The borders must be guarded against the Czechs, the Hungarians, and against the Order, for none of them are to be trusted. But if only a few brave Polish knights go with Withold, Timur the lame will vanquish them, for his commanders will sweep upon us with their vast armies."

"But peace is reigning supreme now," said Toportchie, "from one end of the country to the other, and even the Order is coming to the aid of Withold. The Crusaders, in fact, cannot act otherwise, prompted by a sense of shame—they are anxious to prove to the Holy Father that they are ready and willing to fight the pagans. The courtiers say that Thomtur Lichtenstein came here not only to attend the christening, but also to consult with the King."

"Ah, there he is himself!" cried Matzko, with astonishment.

"True," said Powala, glancing round. "By God, it is he! He has not tarried long with the abbot, it seems, for he must have left Tinetz before daylight."

"Indeed, he must have been in a great hurry," remarked Matzko.

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## CHAPTER X.

Meanwhile Litchenstein passed them. Matzko recognized him at once by the cross embroidered on his robe, but the Crusader did not seem to recognize him, nor Zbishko, for he saw them clad in helmets, from under which only a small part of the knights' faces could be seen.

While passing he nodded his head to Powala and Toportchie, after which he, accompanied by his arm-bearer, began to ascend the steps of the cathedral with a slow and solemn gait. At the same moment the bells began to chime, frightening flocks of doves nestling on the belfry.

Matzko and Zbishko followed the others into the church. The former was somewhat alarmed by the speedy return of Lichtenstein, and was once more a prey to dark misgivings. The attention of Zbishko was absorbed entirely



with the royal court. He had never before beheld such a magnificent edifice as the cathedral, or such a distinguished assembly as was gathered within its walls. On his right and left he was surrounded by the most famous men in the kingdom, men distinguished as warriors and statesmen. Many of those who had planned the marriage of the Grand Prince of Lithuania with the beautiful young Queen of Poland had since departed to a better world, but some were alive yet, and present in the cathedral, and to them reverence was done by all the younger knights.

Zbishko could not remove his admiring eyes from the splendid figure of Yasko of Teuchin, the Castellan of Cracow, who combined severity with solemnity and childish simplicity and uprightness. Zbishko marveled at the wise and grave countenances of other statesmen, or the manly visages of the knights, their hair smoothly combed in front, while dropping in long, wavy curls on their shoulders. Some wore their hair in nets, others used only ribbons, which kept the hair in order. The foreign guests, the envoys of the Roman emperor, Czechs, Hungarians and their suites astonished the Poles with the bright colors of their garments.

The noblemen and princes of Lithuania, standing at the side of the King, were, notwithstanding the summer heat, clad in cloaks lined with costly furs. The Russian princes, arrayed in their loose garments, were ranged before the golden background of the walls of the cathedral, and looked like Byzantian images of saints.

But Zbishko's curiosity was aroused to its highest pitch when the moment for the entrance of the King and Queen drew nigh. He elbowed his way through the vast audience to the gate at the other end, near the altar, where two pillows of red velvet were seen. The King and Queen usually knelt during the entire service.

Zbishko did not wait very long. The first to make his appearance was the King, who, walking slowly, could easily be seen before he approached the altar. His hair was black, and spare on the forehead, but long and brushed behind his ears on the sides. His swarthy face was bare of mustache or beard; he had a very sharp nose, a wrinkled mouth, and a pair of small and sparkling black eyes. He cast quick glances round him in every direction, as if counting the men gathered in the church. His face had a kind, winning expression, but looked keen at the same time. He appeared to be a man whom

Fate had elevated higher than he had himself expected, and he therefore was compelled to act with studied circumspection, lest his actions failed to comport with his dignity. He seemed to fear an infraction of kingly decorum, and this probably was the reason why a certain impatience was betrayed in his movements. It was easy to infer that he was impulsive—and that his wrath and anger were liable to come on suddenly, and that they were likely to be fierce and terrible. He was the same prince who, having lost his patience once with the cunning, ever-scheming Crusaders, had exclaimed to their envoys:

“You come to me with parchments, and I will go to you with my axe!”

But now this natural irritability was subdued and controlled by a sincere inspiration of piety. Not only the recently converted Lithuanian princes, but the oldest pious statesmen of Poland, whose ancestors were pillars of the Christian faith, took their example from the King. Often he knelt on the bare floor, or raised his hands heavenward, and kept them in that position until they dropped from exhaustion. He attended daily at least three masses, and listened to them eagerly, thirstingly. The opening of the vase and the ringing of the bell before the ascension always filled his soul with raptures, inspiration and forgetfulness. After the close of the service, he passed out of the cathedral as if aroused from a long sleep, with a lightened heart, clearer mind, and the courtiers soon learned that this was the best moment to approach him with appeals for pardon or other favors.

The Queen Yadviga entered through the doors of the vestry room. Though the mass had not begun yet, those standing in her vicinity knelt down, thus unwillingly honoring her as a saint. Zbishko did the same.

In this enormous throng there was not a man who doubted for an instant that he really gazed at a saint, whose image would in the days to come grace the altars of churches. For a number of years the strict and penitent life of Yadviga induced the population to do her honor not only as a queen, but as a saint. From mouth to mouth, of noblemen and peasants alike, spread the news of the miracles performed by the saintly Queen. The touch of her hand, it was asserted, cured the diseased; the men and women whose hands and feet had lost their vigor, had regained it by donning the old garments of the Queen. Trustworthy persons declared that they

themselves had heard Christ speaking to her from the altar. Foreign monarchs revered her on their knees. The haughty Order of Crusaders honored her, and dreaded to slight her in any way or manner. Pope Bonifacius IX. spoke of her as a saint, the chosen daughter of the Church. The world lauded her acts of mercy and generosity, and remembered that she, a child of the house of Andegan and the Polish Piasti, a daughter of the powerful Ludvig, born and bred at one of the most brilliant courts, and universally admired as the prettiest girl in the kingdom, had voluntarily denied herself a happy future, stifled in her breast the outcries of the first love that stormed her heart, and married that "savage" prince of Lithuania, in order to convert to Christianity him and his nation—the last of the pagan nations of Europe. What had failed of accomplishment by the combined forces of the Germans, the power of the Order, the expeditions of the Crusaders, at the cost of seas of innocent blood, she had accomplished with one word.

Never before had apostolical glory haloed with its brilliant rays a younger head; never had apostolicism combined with such magnanimous self-denial; never before had womanly beauty beamed with such angelic kindness, such silent sadness.

Her praises were sung at all the courts of Europe. Knights from far away lands streamed into Cracow to see this "Polish queen." Her own race, which she had crowned with fame through her union with Yazello, loved her dearly, and watched over her with unceasing vigilance and deep regard.

Only one great sadness had clouded her bright life and caused her people boundless grief. During the long years of her wedded life God had denied her the bliss of posterity.

But when this blight had vanished, the joyous news flashed like lightning from the Baltic to the Black Sea, to the Carpathian mountains, and filled the hearts of the masses with excessive joy. With the exception of the capital of the Crusaders, this announcement was welcomed at every foreign court. In Rome the "Te Deum" was sung, while in all sections of Poland the conviction was firmly planted that whatever should be the request of the saintly Queen, God would grant it forthwith.

The knights gazed at the figure of the Queen, trying to guess how long they would have to wait for the arrival of the future heir or heiress. Bishop Wiesz of Cracow

who at the same time was also a distinguished physician, the best in his own country, known far and wide in foreign lands, did not predict a quick delivery, and all preparations for the festival were merely made because of the old traditions of those days, when the festivities appropriate to such occasions began several weeks before and lasted long after the birth of the child.

The figure of the Queen still retained its graceful form. She was dressed very plainly, indeed. Once the pet of a brilliant court, the most beautiful princess of Europe, she loved to dress in costly garments, wear chains of precious stones, bracelets and rings; but now the desire for ornamentation was suppressed. For several years she had not only rigidly observed in matters of attire the severe simplicity of a nun, but she even covered her face, fearing that the thought of her own wonderful beauty might awake in her the passion of worldly vanity.

In vain were Yazello's requests, when he learned of her delicate condition, that she decorate her bed with a canopy of gold, studded with precious stones. She replied that having long abandoned all luxuries, she remembered that often the hour of birth is also the hour of death, and therefore the favor shown to her by God she must accept, not surrounded by jewels, but in meekness and simplicity. In the meantime the gold and precious stones found their way into academies, or were employed for the sending of newly converted Lithuanian youths to foreign universities.

The Queen consented to change her appearance of a nun only so far that from the moment the hope of becoming a mother was so strong as to presage realization, she ceased to veil her face, partly thinking that from that moment penitence would not become her.

Now the eyes of all were turned with love to that wonderful face, to which neither gold nor jewels could add in beauty.

## CHAPTER XI.

The Queen walked slowly through the door of the vestry room, her eyes raised heavenward, holding in one hand her prayer-book, in the other a rosary.

Zbishko beheld this lily-like face, those heavenly eyes, the angelic features, calm and peaceful, breathing kindness, mercy and resignation, and his heart beat like a hammer. He knew that to do his duty to his Creator, he had to love his King and Queen, and he loved them in his own fashion. But now his young heart was filled to overflowing with such great love, which heeds no commands, but is born spontaneously, is kindled like a flame, a love which is at the same time an expression of the highest esteem, submission and the incentive to self-sacrifice.

Young, ardent and impetuous was Zbishko, and now he was fairly seized with a passionate desire to prove his love and faithfulness, his devotion as a knight-subject—to do something great, to fly somewhere, to exhibit undaunted prowess in some daring deed and lay down his own life in doing it.

“Why not go with Withold?” whispered he to himself, “for how else can I be of service to this saint, if there will be no war in the immediate future?”

The thought never entered his mind that one can serve his Queen in other ways than with his sword, axe or bludgeon. Zbishko was ready to throw himself bodily against a whole regiment, against the entire army of Timur the Lame. He had a burning desire to mount his steed immediately after the services, and undertake something difficult and perilous. What? He knew not himself. He only knew that he could not endure inactivity, that his hands were burning, that his very soul was aflame.

He forgot completely the danger that threatened him. In the brief moment he forgot Danusia; and when he thought of her again in the cathedral, the singing of childish voices was suddenly heard, and it seemed to him that it was something “different.” To Danusia he had pledged three dead Germans, and he would keep his word; but the Queen stood supreme above all other wo-

men. And when he thought of how many men he was willing to slay for the Queen, he suddenly imagined before him whole hordes of knights in armor, their helmets adorned with peacock and ostrich feathers, and he felt that even victories over all these would not satiate his burning desire to persist in his march of conquest, to display his unceasing devotion to the Queen.

In the meantime, his entranced eyes were fastened upon her face, and the thought tortured him how to pray for her, for he surmised that a Queen is worthy of more than ordinary prayers. He was well able to read "*Pater noster, qui est in cœlis, sanctificetur nomen tuum,*" which he had been taught by a Franciscan monk in Vilna. But perhaps the monk could proceed no farther himself; certainly, Zbishko's memory failed him, for he could proceed no farther with the "*Pater noster.*" Nevertheless he commenced to repeat the opening words, which in his soul assumed the meaning. "Grant our gracious Queen health, longevity and happiness, and constantly watch over her." Notwithstanding that the sword of danger hung over his own head, there was not another man within the walls of the old cathedral whose prayers were more fervent or more sincere than Zbishko's.

Zbishko thought that had he only the opportunity to approach the Queen after mass, to kneel down and embrace her feet, the whole world might have come to a sudden end, for all he cared. But after the first mass there came a second, after the second a third, and then the Queen retired to her apartments, for she accustomed herself to partake of no food till noon, and denied herself the pleasure of participating in the gay breakfast feasts, during which, for the entertainment of the King and his guests, jesters and clowns performed their best.

Suddenly Zbishko, still deep in contemplation, was confronted by old Nicholas of Dlugolias, who led him to the Princess Anna Danuta.

"You will wait on me and Danusia during breakfast, as my courtier," said the Princess. "Try your best to please the King, to win his favor with a word or an act, to find access to his heart. The Crusader, even if he recognizes you, will not dare to complain, seeing that you wait on me at the royal table."

Zbishko kissed the outstretched hand of the Princess, and then turned to Danusia. Although he was more accustomed to wars and combats than to the life of a courtier, he evidently knew just what was the duty of a knight

on beholding the maiden of his heart, for he stepped back, assumed a thoughtful expression, and instead of a greeting exclaimed:

"In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Danusia, lifting to him her blue eyes, inquired:

"Why does Zbishko cross himself? Is not the service at an end?"

"Because, my fairest maiden, that your beauty has increased so much during last night that I could not help marveling!"

But Nicholas of Dlugolias, a man of olden times, was not in love with the new traditions of foreign knights. He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said:

"Why are you wasting time in vain, speaking to her about beauty? She is but a chick that cannot be seen from the ground."

Zbishko shot an angry look at him.

"You dared not call her thus," said he, wrathfully; "and know ye, that if it were not for your old age I would order at once a piece of ground leveled, and mine or your death would wipe away the insult."

"Silence, you simpleton! I could teach you a lesson even to-day!"

"Silence!" repeated the Princess. "Instead of thinking of your own head, you are seeking quarrels. It were better for Danusia had I found for her a more prudent knight. But I warn you, if you wish to rebel, go ye somewhere else. We have no room for such men here."

Zbishko became ashamed of his rashness, and begged the Princess' pardon. However, he still made himself the promise, mentally, that if Nicholas of Dlugolias had a young son he would challenge him some day to mortal combat, on foot or on horseback, but he would never forgive the old man those offensive words. In the meantime he continued to control himself in the royal apartments and decided to challenge no one, unless his honor as a knight absolutely demanded it.

The blowing of trumpets announced that breakfast was being served, and therefore the Princess Anna Danuta, taking the hand of Danusia, went to the royal apartment, at the entrance to which distinguished statesmen and warriors awaited her arrival. Princess Alexandra Zem-itowa was there already, for, as the sister of the King, she occupied a seat nearer to him than her cousin Anna Danuta.

Immediately the breakfast chamber was filled with foreign guests, diplomats and knights, like a beehive with bees. The King sat at the head of the table; next to him were the Bishop of Cracow and Voitzech Yostrejembnik who although he was inferior in dignity to the prelate, occupied a seat at the right of the King, as the envoy of the Pope. Both Princesses were seated at their side.

At the right of Anna Danuta, in a large and comfortable chair sat the corpulent ex-Archbishop Yan of Guesin, a prince and descendant of the royal family of Piasti, the son of Bolka III., the Prince Opolski. Zbishko had heard of him at the court of Withold, and now, standing behind the Princess and Danusia, recognized him by his unusually thick curls, which made his beaming face resemble the church's holy water sprinkler (aspergillum). At the courts of the various Polish princes he was accordingly nicknamed "Aspergillum," while the Crusaders plainly called him "Grapidla." This was a man noted for his indolence and loose morals. Against the consent of the King he had been named as a candidate for the archbishop's pall (or pollium), to the diocese of Genesia; he attempted to take it by an armed force, for which act he had been relieved of his post and banished from the country. For a number of years he lived with the Crusaders, who finally gave him the poor episcopasy of Kamin. His various and sad experiences there made him more tractable, and he wisely decided that it would be much more profitable for him to live in peace with a powerful king. He returned to his fatherland, regained the favor of his sovereign, and patiently waited for a vacancy in one of the capitals, hoping to get a bishopric from the generous King. And, indeed, he received it later on, but in the meantime spared no efforts to humor the King, to cheer him with his wit. Still his heart longed for the freedom of the Crusaders. Even now, disappointed at not being received with open arms by the haughty statesmen and knights of King Yazello's court, he sought the company of Lichtenstein, and rejoiced in sitting next to him at the table.

Zbishko, standing behind the Princess' chair, was so near the Crusader that he could reach him with his hand. His fingers were burning impatiently closing and relaxing again, but this was involuntary, for he succeeded perfectly in subduing his vehemence and passion, and permitted no evil thought to enter his mind. And yet he could not refrain from now and then casting a glance of



dislike at the yellow, bald-growing head of Lichtenstein, at his neck, shoulders and spine, wishing to figure out immediately how much work there would be in store for him were they ever to meet in deadly combat. It seemed to him that the work would be short, indeed, for, though from under the grey cloth of the narrow garments of the Crusader were outlined his powerful proportions, he was after all a mere plaything, a toy warrior in comparison with such men of strength as Powala, Pashka Zlodiey of Biscupdetz, with the two brothers Sulinichick, and a number of other illustrious knights who sat round the royal table.

Zbishko gazed at them with admiration and envy. But his attention was for the most part riveted on the King, who, casting glances on all sides, impatiently brushed his curls behind his ears, seeming displeased with the delay of the breakfast.

For one brief moment the King's glance rested on Zbishko, and at that moment the young man understood what it is to tremble and to fear; and at the thought that he would soon have to face the wrath of the King, he grew alarmed. For the first time he thought of the rashness of his act and the punishment that awaited him, for until then it had all seemed to him uncertain, remote and therefore unworthy of serious consideration. But the German never suspected the proximity of the knight who had been so rash and impetuous as to attack him on the King's highway.

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## CHAPTER XII.

The breakfast began. The attendants brought in a "wine-broth," composed of such abundant mixture of eggs, cinnamon, clove and saffron, that the odor filled the room.

At the same time Ciamshek, the jester, who sat near the entrance, began to imitate the nightingale, a performance which seemingly pleased the King. Another jester accompanied the attendants, distributing the viands, and halted here and there behind the guests, imitating the humming and buzzing of bees with such rare skill that many laid aside their spoons, and began to wave their hands in self-defence, fearing the stings of the insects. This aroused general shouts of laughter.

Zbishko waited on the Princess and Danusia, paying his utmost attention to their needs; but when Thomtur, tugged by the jester, passed his hand over his bald head, to brush away the imaginary bees, he forgot once more his impending danger and laughed so loud and long that tears flowed down his cheeks; while the young Lithuanian Prince Yamout, the son of the governor of Smolensk, seated nearby, joined in the laughter with such good will that his plates trembled, and emptied their delicious contents on the table-cloth.

The Crusader, presently discovering his blunder, put his hand in his pocket, turning at the same time to the ex-Archbishop Grapidla, said a few words in German, which the latter at once translated into Polish:

"The noble knight says to you," addressed he the jester, "that you shall receive two 'skoiza' if you will desist from buzzing so near him, for bees are driven away, while drones are kicked and beaten."

The jester pocketed the two small coins given to him by the Crusader, and availing himself of the liberty which the jesters enjoy at every court, said:

"There is plenty of honey in the land of Dobyinsk and that is why the drones are storming it. Kick them, beat them, King Vladislav!"

"Here, there is a 'grosh' from me! You have spoken well," said Grapidla; "but remember that when the pole is broken the beehive keeper breaks his neck. The drones of Marlborg who have stormed Dobyin have stings and it is quite dangerous to venture into their beehive."

"Oho!" exclaimed Jindarm of Mashkoff, "they can be smoked out, the wretches."

"With what?"

"With powder, of course."

"Or you may cut the beehive in twain with your hatchet," added the gigantic Pashka Zlodiey.

The heart of Zbishko throbbed vehemently. It seemed to him that these words were ominous of an impending war. But Lichtenstein understood them as well, for he had lived for a long time at Torun, and mastered the Polish language. He refused to speak it, however, influenced by his overbearing pride. But now, irritated by the challenging words of Jindarm of Mashkoff, he looked at him piercingly with his steel-gray eyes and replied:

"We shall see!"

"Our fathers have seen it already at Plovtzi, and we saw a thing or two in Wilno," said Jindarm.

"Pax vobiscum!" exclaimed Gropila. "Pax! Pax! Let the guest Nikola of Kuroff resign from his episcopacy of Kul, and the gracious King grant me his place; I will then preach to you such a beautiful, soul-stirring sermon about the love of Christian peoples and nations, that your very souls will be upturned from sheer joy and rapture. What is all this hatred, if not ignis—aye, ignis infernalis—such an infernal fire that water will not extinguish it and only wine can put it out. Give us wine! We will devote it to a good purpose! As the late Bishop Zawiska of Kuroevenk loved to say:

"And waste it on the flames of hell! as the devil says," added the jester.

"May the devil take you!"

"It will be astonishing if he lays his satanic hands on you. The devil has never been seen yet with a holy water sprinkler, but I believe we shall all have that exceptional pleasure."

"But before the devil engages in such a wonderful performance I will give you a sprinkling. Let us have wine! Long live love among Christians!"

"Among real Christians!" repeated Thomtur, with emphasis.

"What do you mean?" cried Wish, the Bishop of Krakow. "Are you not at present in a most Christian kingdom? Are not our cathedrals older than those of Mariborg?"

"I know not," replied the Crusader.

The King was very sensitive on all questions of the Christian faith. It now seemed to him that the Crusaders had chosen him for a target, and his cheeks flushed crimson, his eyes flashed fire.

"What is this?" asked he, scornfully. "Am I not a Christian King?"

"The kingdom is considered Christian," coldly retorted the Crusader, "but its customs are pagan. . . ."

In a few moments there was deep silence, suddenly broken by the rising of a number of knights, powerful, famous warriors, conquerors in many a bloody battle, and in numerous distinguished tournaments. Now flushing, now grown pale with wrath, then grinding their teeth, they interrupted each other with exclamations:

"Woe to us! he is our guest and cannot be challenged!"

And Zovisha the Black, most famous among famous,

the model of knighthood, turned his cold and threatening face to Lichtenstein and said:

"I do not recognize you, Thomtur Lichtenstein. How dare you insult a noble nation; presuming upon your position as an envoy, you are immune from punishment?"

But Lichtenstein faced him unflinchingly and slowly, clearly, punctuating every word, he said:

"The chief of our Order, before he settled in Prussia, battled in Palestine; but even there the wild Saracens respected the sacred person of an envoy. You alone have no respect for them, and therefore I called your customs pagan."

The tumult increased. Again cries were heard from various parts of the table:

"Woe to us! Woe to us!"

But all were silent when the King, whose face bore the unmistakable stamp of anger, clapped his hands several times, in the old Lithuanian fashion.

In an instant arose the Castellan of Cracow, the old Yasko Tapor of Teuchin, an old sage, whose venerable aspect inspired confidence and respect. He said:

"Most noble knight Lichtenstein, if you have been insulted or wronged in any manner as an envoy, speak out, and severe justice will be meted out to the culprit."

"In no other Christian land has there ever happened anything similar to what I have experienced," replied the Crusader. "Yesterday, on the road to Tinetz, I was attacked by one of your knights, and although he could imagine my position by the cross on my cloak, he attempted to take my life."

Zbishko heard these words, and his face grew deathly pale. Unwillingly he looked at the King, whose face at that moment was awful to behold.

Yasko of Teuchin remained thoughtful for a few moments, then he said:

"Can it be true? Is this possible?"

"Ask the Knight of Tatchow; he witnessed it."

The eyes of all were turned to Powala, who stood silent for some time, his eyes lowered to the ground. Finally he said:

"Yes, it is true."

When they heard that, the excited knights began to cry: "Shame! shame! May the earth open before such a knight!" And stricken by grief and shame they beat their breasts, while others struck the leaden plates on the table, not knowing where to turn their eyes.

"Why did you not kill him?" thundered the King.

"Because he belongs to justice, to the court," replied Powala.

"You have put him in chains?" inquired the Castellán, Tapor of Teuchin.

"No! He swore upon the honor as a knight that he would appear at court to stand trial.

"And he will not come," exclaimed Lichtenstein, with sarcasm.

At the same instant a young, sad voice was heard not far off, immediately behind the Crusader:

"God prevent that I should prefer shame to death! I did it—Zbishko of Bogdanetz."

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### CHAPTER XIII.

The young man's bold confession was a signal for the knights to make a rush for Zbishko, but the stern, angry look of the King restrained them from the otherwise inevitable attack.

The King rose, his eyes aflame with anger, his voice thundering, like a heavily laden wagon rolling over a paved thoroughfare.

"Cut his head off! Cut his head off!" cried he.

"Let the Crusader take it with him to the magistrate in Marlburg."

Then, turning to the young Lithuanian prince, the son of the Governor of Smolensk, he said:

"Hold him fast, Yamout!"

Terrified at the anger of the King, Yamout put his trembling hands on the shoulders of Zbishko, who turned to him his pale, haggard face, and said:

"I will not run away!"

But the white-haired chancellor, Pon Tapor, of Teuchin raised his hand as a sign that he wished to speak; and when silence was restored, he began:

"Gracious King! Let this knight be convinced that not your just outburst of anger, but our sacred laws, punish attempts on the person of an envoy. Lest he may gain the idea that we have no Christian laws in our glorious kingdom. To-morrow we will examine the culprit."

In speaking the last words, he raised his voice to a high pitch. Apparently not even admitting the possibility of being disobeyed, he turned to Yamout and added:

"Look him up in a dungeon-cell. And you, knight of Tatchew, will now give us your testimony pertaining to the case."

"I will gladly relate to you the mishap of this youth, of which no grown-up man could be guilty," replied Powala, gazing morosely at Thomtur.

"He speaks the truth!" echoed the other knights. "Zbishko is a mere lad! Why have we all been insulted for the sake of some silly escapade of a boy?"

A moment of silence followed, during which all glances were turned toward the Crusader; while Yamout, pale and trembling, led Zbishko to give him in charge of the sharpshooters who were stationed at the gates of the palace.

The young and tender heart of Yamout was full of compassion for his prisoner, a fellow feeling dictated by his inborn hatred toward the Germans. But as a Lithuanian, accustomed to blindly obey the commands of the Prince, and frightened by the anger of the King, he could do little more than whisper cheering words to Zbishko, as they marched along.

"Take my advice, friend," he whispered; "hang yourself; it's the best you can do. The King is enraged, and your head will assuredly be cut off by the executioner. Why not humor the King? Hang yourself, friend. This is an honorable custom with us."

Zbishko, half unconscious from shame and fright, at first did not understand the Prince's words, but finally seemed to comprehend, and stood like one amazed and bewildered.

"What are you talking about, man?" he asked at length.

"Hang yourself, friend!" repeated the Lithuanian. "They cannot try and condemn you then. You will thus humor the King—make him feel good!"

"Be hung yourself!" yelled Zbishko, "you pagan! Though you have been baptized, your hide remains pagan, and you cannot even understand that it is a sin for a Christian to commit suicide."

But the Prince shrugged his shoulders.

"This is not suicide," he said; "you are not doing it of your own free will—you're only anticipating the hangman."

The thought entered Zbishko's mind that for that kind suggestion of the Prince he ought to challenge him to a duel, on foot or on horseback, with swords or axes, but



"Danusia, embracing his feet with her tiny hands, clamored 'O, King, forgive Zhishko! Forgive Zhishko!'"  
See page 73.





he cursed that desire within his heart, remembering that he would have no time for it. He bowed his head sadly, and permitted himself to be handed over to the sharpshooters of the palace.

In the palace, at the same time, the attention of the knights assembled was turned into another direction. Danusia, seeing what was taking place, at first was so terror-stricken that she lost her breath, and for some time remained speechless. Her pretty face became as pale as a sheet, her eyes were wide open, and she stared at the King with the blank expression of the wax figure of a saint seen in the Catholic churches. But when she heard, in unmistakable terms, that Zbishko was to forfeit his head for his rash act, when he was led away and out of the room, her childish heart was almost rent with grief. Her brows and lips twitched convulsively, and neither the fear of the King nor the biting of her lips could force this little martyr to repress her feelings. Suddenly she burst into such loud cries and groans that the entire assembly turned to her, and the King inquired: "What is this?"

"Most gracious King!" exclaimed Princess Anna Danuta, "this is the daughter of Yourand Spiohow, to whom that unfortunate knight pledged his love and service. He made a vow to get three helmets with peacock feathers. When he espied such a helmet on the Thomtur (Crusader), he thought that God Himself had sent it to him. Zbishko acted rashly, but was not inspired by mischief or malice. Be merciful, gracious King; do not punish him. On my knees I pray to thee, do not punish him."

Saying this, she rose, and seizing Danusia by the hand, approached the King, who at once began to retreat. But they both fell on their knees, and Danusia, embracing his feet, with her tiny hands, clamored:

"Oh, King, forgive Zbishko! Forgive Zbishko!"

And almost unconscious from fright and emotion, the little maiden hid her golden head in the folds of the gray robe of the King, kissing his knees, and trembling like an aspen leaf.

The Princess was kneeling on his other side, and with a silent, fervent prayer in her eyes, gazed at the King, on whose face confusion was apparent.

Confused by their entreaties, he moved away, but he did not repulse Danusia, and seemed only to defend him-

self from her, by waving both his hands, as if opposing the attack of flies.

"Leave me in peace!" cried he. "He has committed a crime! He has disgraced the whole kingdom. Cut off his head!"

But the soft little hands embraced his knees with more vigor, and the childish voice tearfully pleaded:

"Forgive Zbishko, King! Forgive Zbishko!"

At this moment a number of voices were heard.

"Yurand of Spichow! A famous knight, a terror to the Germans!"

"And this youth has already distinguished himself at Wilna," added Powala.

But the King continued to defend himself, though the sight of Danusia was still quite embarrassing to him. He was seemingly affected.

"Leave me in peace!" said he. "This offense was not against me, and I cannot acquit him. Let him obtain the pardon of the envoy of the Order, then I will grant him my forgiveness. If not he shall be beheaded!"

"Forgive him, Lichtenstein!" pleaded Zoviska Cherni Sulnichick. "The magistrate himself will be pleased at your leniency."

"Forgive him!" entreated both women.

"Forgive him! forgive him!" repeated the knights, in chorus.

Lichtenstein, the Crusader, closed his eyes and sat with uplifted head, as if enjoying the attention he received on every hand, the humility of the two princesses and the appeals of such famous knights. In an instant he changed. He lowered his head, crossed his hands over his breast, and from the bold, defiant man, became humble and meek, speaking in a low, tender voice:

"Christ, our Saviour, forgave the murderer on his cross—forgave all his enemies."

"A true knight speaks thus!" exclaimed Bishop Voin.

"A true, a genuine knight!"

"How can I help forgiving," continued Lichtenstein, "since I am not only a Christian, but a monk. Therefore, I forgive him with all my heart, as a servant of Christ and as a monk.

"Praise to him!" thundered Powala of Tatchnow.

"Praise to him!" repeated the others.

"But," said the Crusader, "I am an envoy and represent the majesty of the entire Order, which is the Order of Christ, and, therefore, whoever has insulted me, as an

envoy, has insulted the entire Order, and whoever has insulted the Order, has insulted Christ, and such an insult, taking God and mankind for my witnesses, I can not, I dare not forgive. And if your laws are such as to provide no punishment for the culprit, let this become known to all other emperors and kings of Christian lands."

Deep silence followed the Crusader's last utterance. From time to time the grinding of teeth was heard, the heavy breathing of men who endeavored to control their rage, and the lamentation of Danusia.

Before sunset the hearts of all the knights beat with sympathy for Zbishko. The same knights who were in the morning ready to fall upon Zbishko and cut him into pieces with their sabres at the first signal of the King, now devised various plans to save him. The Princesses determined to seek the favor of the Queen, to ask her gracious intervention and pleading with Lichtenstein, that he might recall his complaint, or at least beg her to write to the magistrate that he, the Crusader, drop the charge.

The latter way seemed the surest of success, as Queen Yadviga had been petted and honored so highly by all the courts that the magistrate of the Order would have exposed himself to the anger of the Pope and rebuke of all Christian princes had he not granted her request.

This was improbable, because the magistrate, Condrat von Youngingen, was a quiet man, more peaceful than all his predecessors. Unfortunately, the Bishop of Cra-cow, Wish, who at the same time was the chief surgeon of her majesty, issued strict orders that not a word about the affair should be uttered in the presence of the Queen.

"She is always sorely grieved, when she hears of death sentences," said he; "even if the victim is a mere robber, she takes it to heart. How deeply would she be affected now, when the head of a brave youth, deserving her sympathy, is at stake? The least disturbance may easily bring upon her some dangerous physical derangement, and her health means more for the entire kingdom than the heads of ten knights."

He finally declared that if any one should dare to disobey his injunction, and molest the Queen, he would have that person excommunicated and delivered unto the merciless wrath of the King.

The Princesses, frightened at these threats, therefore re-

solved not to approach the Queen, but to prevail upon the King to have mercy on the lad.

Zbishko had the sympathy of the entire court. Powala announced that while he would not hesitate to tell the truth, he would at the same time endeavor to impress the King with the idea that the whole act was merely a childish escapade, without malicious forethought. And yet the knights could not but admit that if the Crusader could not be persuaded to withdraw his charge, the law, severe as it was, would have to take its course.

Lichtenstein's vindictiveness had brought on himself the hatred and indignation of the court. The knights, one and all, repeated openly:

"He is an envoy, and cannot be challenged to combat; but when he returns to Marlborg. God grant that he may die a natural death!"

Those were not idle threats, for the belted knights dared not play with their words, and every syllable uttered was taken seriously; a pledge made had to be kept, or the knight was in danger of forfeiting his head.

Powala, at this juncture, proved himself the most embittered of them all, for in his home in Tatchow there was a little girl of the age of Danusia who called him father, and the tears and lamentations of Danusia almost broke his heart.

On the same day he paid a visit to Zbishko in his underground cell, cheered him, bade him have courage and told him of the pleadings of both princesses and the tears of Danusia.

When Zbishko heard that the little girl whom he adored had thrown herself at the feet of the King for his sake, he was so touched that knowing not how to express his gratitude and his longing to once more behold her dear face, he wiped the tears off his cheeks and said:

"God bless her! And may He in His mercy grant me a duel for her! I have not promised to kill enough Germans for her; she deserves a dead German for every year she has graced this world. Oh, that the Lord Jesus Christ would release me from this dungeon!" And he raised his eyes in supplication toward heaven.

"You'd better pledge something to one of the churches," said the knight of Tatchow; "for if your pledge will please the Almighty, your freedom shall be restored to you at once. As to Lichtenstein, he has been approached by your uncle, and I will follow him in a few hours. You need not feel ashamed in begging his pardon

yourself, for you have insulted him; besides, you would not be humbling yourself before Lichtenstein, but before an envoy. Are you prepared to make an apology?"

"Since a knight as noble as yourself advises it, I shall certainly do it. But if he insists that I should beg his pardon in the manner he proposed on the way to Tinetz, I would rather my head was cut off. There still remains my uncle; he will see to it that Lichtenstein meets his doom as soon as his duties of envoy are at an end."

"We must wait and hear of his reply to Matzko," said Powala, after some meditation.

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

Matzko was indeed on an errand of mercy, but departed from the proud German gloomy and dark as the night. He went at once to the King, to whom he was introduced by the Castellan himself. The King gave him a most cordial reception, he having become much calmer after the first excitement was over, and when Matzko bent his knees before him he ordered him to rise, inquiring in most friendly tones, what he wished.

"Most gracious lord!" began Matzko, "since a crime has been committed, there must also be a punishment meted out, for otherwise there would be no justice in this world. But the crime is entirely mine, for not only have I failed to tame the wild character of the lad, but I am to be blamed for favoring and encouraging his impetuosity. Thus I brought him up. When a baby he was left to my care by his dying father; thus he was educated in that school of life we call war. The crime is mine, most gracious lord, for more than once I taught him that stern lesson: 'First plunge your dagger, then look and see whom you have killed,' for all is fair in war, especially many things that may be very bad at court. But this lad is as good as the purest gold, the last of his race, and my heart is breaking for him. . . ."

"He has disgraced me! he has disgraced the whole kingdom!" exclaimed the King, shaking his head sadly; "must I smear him with honey for that?"

Matzko did not reply, for at the thought of Zbishko and his impending fate his throat was parched by grief; but after a long, painful pause he said in a voice full of emotion, trembling with passion:

"I never suspected that I loved him so dearly, until this misfortune struck us both! But I am old, and nearing my grave, and he is the last of our race. He will die, and all our illustrious family, our very name dies forever. Merciful King and master, have pity on our family!"

Once more Matzko fell at the feet of the King and stretched out his hands hardened in war, and with tears in his manly voice pleaded:

"We have defended Wilno. God has blessed us with abundant booty. To whom shall I leave it? If the Crusader demands punishment let his request be granted, but pray permit me to lay my head on the executioner's block. Of what use is it to me without Zbishko? He is young, and, if his life be spared, he will clear our estate from all indebtedness, and raise a generation of knights, as the Lord hath commanded all men brave and true. The Crusader will not care whose head has fallen, as long as his thirst for vengeance is appeased. And he will lose little by it. It's hard for a man to die of his own free will, but after ripe thought, I must confess that it were best for one man to die than for a whole race to disappear from the records of history."

With these words he embraced the feet of the King, while the eyelids of the latter began to flutter, which was a sign that he was exceedingly affected. Finally he said:

"This shall never occur! I will never permit a belted knight to be beheaded without cause. This shall not be!"

"And it would not be just, either!" added the Castellan.

"The laws are made to punish the guilty," said the King; "but what a monster is he who cares not whose blood is being shed. And does it not strike you that the disgrace would fall a thousand times heavier on the honor of your family were Zbishko to consent to this arrangement. He and his future generation would never be able to wash the disgrace away from a name that has never been stained."

"Zbishko would never agree to this," interposed Matzko. "But if it could all be arranged without him suspecting it he would avenge my death, as I will avenge his."

"Aha!" said Teuchin; "but why not persuade the Crusader to withdraw his charge?"

"I pleaded with the German this morning."

"Well?" eagerly asked the king, "what did he say?"

"His reply was: 'You refused to make an apology on the road to Tinetz—now I refuse to accept it.'"

"And why did you refuse it, then?"

"Because he demanded that we dismount our horses, and on foot humble ourselves before the whole assembly of knights and ladies."

The King brushed his curls under his ears, and was about to say something when a courtier entered the room with the announcement that the knight von Lichtenstein asked the King for an audience.

Hearing this the King glanced at Yasko of Teuchin, then at Matzko, but ordered them to remain. In the meantime the Crusader entered the room, bowed to the King and said:

"Gracious King! Here is my written complaint of the insult and wrong shown to me in your kingdom."

"Make your complaints to him," said the King, pointing to Yasko of Teuchin.

Looking the King straight in the face, however, the Crusader said:

"I know naught of your laws, much less of your way of judging. I know one thing, though—that the envoy of the Order can only make his complaints to the august person of the King himself."

The small eyes of King Yagello began to blink impatiently, but he stretched out his hand, took the complaint and handed it to the knight of Teuchin.

The latter opened the document and began to read it, but the farther he progressed the sadder and gloomier became his countenance.

"Master," said he at length, "you are persistently demanding the execution of this youth, as if his life were a menace and a danger for your entire Order. Are your Crusaders in fear even of children?"

"We Crusaders fear no one!" haughtily replied Lichtenstein.

"Not even God!" added the Castellan, in low tones.

The next day Powala of Tachew did all in his power before the court of the Castellan to belittle Zbishko's crime. But in vain did he ascribe the occurrence to the youth of Zbishko and his inexperience in affairs of the world; in vain did he strive to impress the court that even grown men, if they had made a vow to obtain three helmets with peacock feathers, and were fervently praying to God about it, and, arising, espied before them one of the knights that wears such helmets, they would be firmly convinced that God had heeded their prayer, that the knight was a godsend. There was one thing, however, he

could not deny, or reduce its importance—that were it not for his timely interference, the lance of Zbishko would have pierced the heart of the Crusader.

Lichtenstein ordered his attendant to bring into the court room the armor he wore that fatal day, and it was proven that the plate of steel was very thin and fine, such as was used by knights only on gala occasions, more for ornament than protection. There was no doubt that Zbishko, with his enormous strength would have perforated that plate without much difficulty, killing the envoy outright.

The next witness was Zbishko himself. To the question whether he had any intention of killing the envoy he calmly but firmly replied:

"I called to him from a distance to raise his lance, for I did not care to capture a helmet, unless the knight's head went with it, but had he yelled back to me that he was an envoy, I should never have molested him."

These words found favor with the knights, who, moved by sympathy toward the young brave in distress, assembled in crowds. Immediately a number of voices were heard:

"True! Why did he not yell?"

But the face of the Castellan remained stern and morose. He prevented further demonstrations by commanding silence, and after a short pause looked penetratingly at Zbishko, and finally asked:

"Do you swear by the tortures of our Saviour that you saw neither cloak nor cross?"

"I do! Had I seen the cross I would have thought that the knight was one of our own warriors, against whom my hand has never been raised."

"But how could any other Crusader appear at the gates of Cracow unless he was an envoy or some member of the Polish court?"

To this Zbishko made no response, for really there was no answer. It was perfectly clear to every one that if it were not for the timely intervention of the knight of Tachow the court would not gaze upon the armor of the envoy, but upon the dead envoy himself, with his breast perforated by Zbishko's lance, to the eternal disgrace of the Polish nation. The conviction gained ground even with those that sympathized with Zbishko, that the verdict could not be favorable.

A moment later the Castellan resumed:

"Since in your rashness you did not give a thought to



the person you attacked, since the attack itself was not prompted by malice, the Saviour will forgive your sin; but you, unfortunate, will have to trust yourself to the mercies of the most Holy Mother of God. Since I, a human sinner, cannot forgive you."

Hearing this, Zbishko, though he expected such a verdict, grew deadly pale, but in an instant he shook his head, his long, wavy curls falling over his face, made a sign of the cross, and calmly said:

"It is hard; but it's the will of God!"

Then he silently turned to Matzko and with his eyes pointed to Lichtenstein, as if leaving him to his mercy, and Matzko nodded, showing that he understood and would not forget. But Lichtenstein also understood that exchange of glances, and though in his breast there throbbed as brave a heart as it was cruel and malicious, a slight shudder passed over his whole body—so severe, so cruel, so terrible seemed to him the grim face of the old war-scarred Matzko. The Crusader understood that from this moment between himself and the old knight there would begin a bitter feud, for life and death—that even long after his return to private life, when he bore the title of envoy no more, he would have to face this relentless old warrior, and no place, not even Marlborg, would afford him a safe haven.

In the meantime the Castellan withdrew to an adjoining chamber to dictate the formal sentence of Zbishko to an experienced clerk of the court.

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## CHAPTER XV.

During the recess numerous knights approached the Crusader with sneering remarks.

"God grant that on the great day of judgment you shall meet with more mercy."

"Do you rejoice at your victory? Are you pleased with this sacrifice?"

But the only opinion important to Thomtur was that of Zawisha. The latter was famous at court and abroad for his military experience, for his knowledge of knightly laws and customs, and his strict obedience to the same. In the most complicated affairs, wherein the honor of a knight was in question, knights came to him from distant lands, and no man ever dared to contradict him, not

only because duelling with him was impossible, but because he was considered the personification of honesty. One word of rebuke, one word of praise, from the lips of that famous knight, made or unmade the reputation of many an illustrious warrior. Therefore Thomtur approached him, and, as if wishing to justify himself in his cruel behavior, said:

"The Grand Master alone, and in his capitol, could pardon him. I can not do it."

"Your Grand Master has nothing to do with our laws," replied Zawisha. The man to show mercy is our gracious King, but not he."

"As an envoy, I was compelled to demand his punishment."

"But before you became an envoy, you were a knight, Lichtenstein."

"Do you think that I have sinned against my honor and conscience?"

"You know our knightly traditions and laws. You know that a knight must resemble two animals—a lion and a lamb. Which of the two do you resemble now?"

"You are not my judge."

"True, I am not. But you asked me whether, in my opinion, you have sinned against your honor as a knight, and I made my answer accordingly."

"You have not answered in a pleasant way. I can not swallow it."

"You seem to choke with your own measures, not with mine."

"But Christ will remember that I have been more influenced by the desire to preserve the honor of our Order than to win your idle praise."

"Christ will judge us all, according to our deserts."

Further conversation was interrupted by the reappearance of the Castellan and his secretary. It was long known to everybody that the verdict would not be favorable to Zbishko; still deep silence reigned as soon as the Castellan took his seat at the table. In one hand he held a crucifix, with the other he motioned to Zbishko to kneel.

The secretary began to read aloud the sentence worded in Latin. Neither Zbishko nor the assembled knights understood one word of it, but all surmised that it was a death sentence.

When the secretary had finished his reading, Zbishko

several times struck his breast with his hand, repeating: "Oh, God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Then he arose and threw himself into the arms of Matzko, who silently covered him with kisses, his curly head, his eyes, his lips. . . .

In the evening of the same day the heralds announced to the knights, the guests of the court, and the townsmen, that the noble Zbishko of Bogdanetz, had been sentenced, by the verdict of the Castellan, to a horrible death; his head was to be cut off by the headsman's axe.

But Matzko implored the authorities to postpone the execution. In this he succeeded without much trouble, for by the customs of those days, condemned men were allowed time to distribute their earthly belongings to various friends, and ample opportunity was afforded them to bid the last farewell to their relatives and make their peace with God.

Lichtenstein himself had no desire to insist upon immediate execution. He understood that since the dignity of the Order had been respected, it was impolitic to offend a mighty monarch, to whom he had been sent not only for the purpose of participating in the festivities on the occasion of the Queen's delivery, but also to open negotiations about the Dobijinsk lands.

The health of the Queen was now the most important question. Bishop Wisz would not hear of the execution taking place before the Queen's delivery, reasoning justly that such a grave affair could not be kept very well from the Queen, whose sensitive heart would be sorely grieved. The slightest excitement was dangerous to her feeble health, and the shock might prove fatal. Thus Zbishko could expect to see a good many suns rise and set before facing the headsman's axe—a good many days, aye, and weeks, in which to take affectionate leave of his friends and acquaintances.

Matzko visited him daily, cheering and consoling him to the best of his ability. The time was spent in sad conversations, with Zbishko's inevitable death as the main topic. But to the old man the abrupt ending of their race seemed a calamity too great to endure.

"There will be no alternative left for you, uncle; you will have to marry," said Zbishko, on one occasion.

"It were better to find some distant relative," gloomily replied Matzko. "How can I think of marriage when you are about to lose your head? And even if I were compelled to marry, I could not do it until my pledge to you

concerning Lichtenstein is fulfilled—until I have had my revenge. Do not worry, you shall be avenged."

"Let me die with this-consoling thought, at least: I knew, I felt it, that you would not let him go unpunished. But how will you accomplish it?"

"When he ceases to hold the protecting insignia of envoy, there will either be war or peace. Do you understand? If there be a prospect of war, I will send him a challenge, that before the war he meet me on the field of honor."

"On even, graded ground?"

"Yes, on horseback or on foot; but the duel will have to be till death claims one of us. If there be peace, I will go to Marlborg, and strike my lance against the gates of the palace, while the trumpeter will announce to the Crusader that I challenge him to mortal combat. He shall not escape me; I assure you, he cannot hide himself from me."

"Of course not. But be sure not to miss him. Let him know——"

"Miss him! I could not grapple with Zawisha, with Pashka, with Powala; but, without undue self-praise, I will say that I could readily conquer two of his kind. Was not the Frizian knight more powerful than the Crusader. And when I rained blow after blow on him, without having my helmet on, where did my axe land? On his feet, did it not?"

At this Zbishko heaved a deep sigh of relief, and said:

"The assurance you have given me will make it easier to die!" And both sighed again.

At last the old knight, his voice trembling with emotion, said:

"Don't worry, my lad. On the day of judgment your bones will not have to seek each other. I ordered for you an oaken coffin, strong and handsome. The heavenly saints have none better. You shall not die like a slave. No, my boy; and I will see that your head shall not be severed from your body on a block covered with the same coarse cloth that is used for common citizens. I have arranged it all with Anulei, and he will get you the finest cloth the market affords—such cloth that the King might not be ashamed to have his robes made of it. I will not begrudge you early and late masses, either. Don't worry, my lad."

The heart of Zbishko grew lighter, and bending his lips to the hand of his uncle he muttered:

"God will repay you!"

But at times, notwithstanding all consolation and words of cheer, he was suddenly seized by pangs of grief and longing. Once, when Matzko came to visit him in his cell, he scarcely had time to greet the prisoner, when the latter, looking longingly through the bars of his window, asked:

"How is it outside?"

"The weather is as fine as gold. The sun is bright and warm, so bright that it seems the whole world is basking in his rays, rejoicing."

Zbishko crossed his hands behind his neck and throwing his head backward, said:

"Oh, Almighty God! To have a fleet horse under me, to roam and gallop over the green wide fields! It's hard to die when one is so young—very hard!"

"Men are dying on horseback, too," replied Matzko.

"Yes, but how many can they kill before they perish themselves?"

And he began to make inquiries about the various knights he had seen at the royal court; about Zawisha, Farnrey, Powala of Tachow, Lisa of Targowisk and numerous others; what they were doing, how they spent their days, and he listened eagerly to the stories of Matzko, who described how they galloped on their horses, at break of day; how they excelled each other in tugs of war, how they measured strength in duels with swords, or baton, with steel points, and, finally how they feasted, and what songs they sang.

The heart and soul of Zbishko were yearning to flee to them, to be with them; and when he heard that Zawisha intended soon after the christening of the coming crown-prince, to invade the Thuringian plain, in his expedition against the Turks, he could not keep from exclaiming:

"Oh, if they would only let me go with him! If I die I must, were it not better, more glorious, to lose my life in a fierce battle with the cursed pagan!"

But that was impossible.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

At about this time something occurred which changed the whole aspect of affairs. Both princesses of Masowetz never ceased scheming on behalf of Zbishko, who had

captivated their hearts by his youth and beauty. After all efforts to persuade Lichtenstein to relent had proved futile the Princess Alexandra determined to write to the Grand Master of the Order. The Grand Master was not in a position to change the verdict of the Castellan, still his plea with the King was sure to bring beneficial results. Yagello, it is true, could not forgive the man who had insulted an envoy, though in his heart of hearts, he would be only too happy to yield to the entreaties of the Grand Master.

Once more Hope, the magician, lightened the hearts of the two princesses. Princess Alexandra, whose fancy for the polished knights of the Order was a well known fact, was held by the latter in high esteem. Time and again letters and precious gifts had been sent to her from Marlborg, in which the Grand Master lauded her to the skies, as a pious benefactress and protectress of the Order. Her words exercised a great influence, and it seemed more than probable that her request would be granted. The main difficulty was to find a messenger who would undertake to carry the letter and bring a reply within an exceedingly short time.

Matzko heard of the Princess' determination, and accepted the task without a moment's hesitation. The Castellan set a date, until which the time of Zbishko's execution would be postponed. Full of hopes, Matzko prepared for the journey, and then paid a visit to Zbishko in his cell, to share with him the joyous news.

At the first moment Zbishko was almost overcome with joy. It seemed to him as if the doors of his prison were already open, and he could walk out, a free man. Then he fell into deep contemplation, heaved a deep sigh and finally said:

"You can expect little good from the Germans! Lichtenstein himself might have asked the King for mercy, which act of generosity would have gained for him hosts of friends, besides saving his own skin from our vengeance, but he had no desire to do it."

"He grew angry because we refused to beg his pardon on the highway of Tinetz. Of the Grand Master Kondrat only the best is spoken. And, lastly, you can lose nothing."

"Of course," said Zbishko, "but I would not bow too low before him, if I were you."

"Why should I humiliate myself? I bring the letter of the Princess Alexandra—and that is all."

"Ah How kind you are! God bless you!" exclaimed Zbishko.

Suddenly he raised his eyes and looked at his uncle, and said in determined voice:

"But if the King should pardon me, Lichtenstein shall be mine, not yours! Remember!"

"You are not certain yet whether your head is safe, and it were folly to make rash vows. You have indulged too much in foolish pledges," replied the old man, soberly.

Then they threw themselves in each others' arms, and Zbishko was left alone once more. Hope and despair alternately took possession of his soul.

When night came, and with it a storm; when the grated window of his cell was lighted by flashes of lightning, and the walls shook from the terrible peals of thunder; when the wind with a shrill whistle penetrated his cell and blew out the dimly burning candle at the head of his bed, Zbishko, awed by the terrible darkness, again lost hope, and the whole night long sleep shunned his eyes.

"I shall not escape from death," thought he, "and all their efforts are in vain."

But the next morning Princess Anna Danuta visited him in his cell, and with her came Danusia, with her lyre tucked away under her belt.

Zbishko threw himself at her feet, and though he bore the marks of fatigue and a sleepless night, he remembered the duty of a devoted knight, and failed not to give due praise to her beauty and virtues. But the Princess raised to him her sad eyes, full of alarm, and said:

"Do not waste your admiration, my lad, for if Matzko does not return with a favorable reply, you, unfortunate, will admire in Heaven greater beauties than hers."

She wept, thinking of the fate of the knight, and Danusia followed her example, in her childish way, shedding bitter tears in profusion.

Once more Zbishko knelt at their feet, for his heart softened at the sight of their tears. He did not love Danusia, with the love of a man for a woman, but now he suddenly felt that his whole soul was wrapt in her—that within his heart something strange and wonderful was taking place at the sight of her, as if he were now undergoing a transformation and ceased to be a man of reckless spirit, breathing war, but a youth yearning for the bliss of love. And his heart was torn at the thought

that he must leave her, that he could not fulfill the pledges made in such solemn earnest.

"I will not throw at your feet the helmet with peacock feathers," he declared. "But when I shall face the image of God, I will say: 'Forgive my sins, oh Lord; but whatever there is best and sweetest on earth bestow upon the maiden of Spichow.'"

"You have known each other but such a short time," said the Princess; "God grant it may not be in vain!"

Zbishko began to recollect the scene in the hostelry of Tinetz, and was overcome by emotions. At length he begged Danusia to sing the song she sang that night, when he caught her in his arms and carried her to the Princess.

And Danusia, though she was not then in the mood for singing, raised her graceful little head to the ceiling of the cell, and, like a bird, half closing her eyes, began.

Suddenly from under her lowered eyelids tears flowed abundantly down her rosy cheeks and she could sing no more.

Zbishko caught her in his arms, as on the night of their first meeting, and began to pace his cell with her, repeating enthusiastically:

"Oh! If God would grant me freedom, you would grow into womanhood, and with your father's consent, I would take you unto me, my beauty!"

Danusia, embracing his neck with her tiny hands, hid her tear-stained face on his shoulder, while in his heart despair grew apace—a despair, which, coming from the depths of a full Slav nature, poured itself out in the form of a simple ditty of the fields: "I would take you, my maiden fair, I would take you!"

. . . . .

Toward evening of the twenty-first day of June, a report suddenly spread through the palace that the Queen had been suddenly taken seriously ill. The summoned physicians remained the entire night in her room. But through the servants the alarmed courtiers learned that the Queen was threatened by premature delivery.

The Castellan of Cracow, Yasko Topor of Teuchin, dispatched that very night swift courtiers to the King.

On the morning of the second day the news spread like wildfire over the town and suburbs. It was Sunday, and the great throngs of people filled the churches, where prayers were given for the health of the Queen, by order



of the princesses. Doubts, fears, indefinite and vague, took possession of the masses. After the services the visiting knights, who had gathered here from distant lands to attend the expected festivals, the nobility and the delegations of merchants, made their way to the palace. The brotherhoods and unions marched with their banners. At noon enormous crowds surrounded Wovel. In their midst the royal guards maintained order, urging the men to be quiet and peaceful. The town was almost entirely deserted, save a few peasants from the suburbs, who learning of the Queen's illness, had hurried to the palace.

At last, at the main gates appeared the Bishop and the Castellan, and with them several clerks of the cathedral, royal officers and a number of knights. They moved before the walls of the palace, mingled among the masses, and on their faces the sad news could be read; but they issued strict orders to the people that they should refrain from demonstrations, cries and tumult, for the noise was injurious to the patient.

Then they announced to the crowds that the Queen had given birth to a daughter.

The news filled the hearts of the loyal masses with joy, since the royal mother was reported to be out of danger.

The crowds began to disperse, for they could not give vent to their feelings at the gates of the palace, yet each and every one wished to express his joy. No sooner were the streets leading to the square deserted, than songs were heard and joyful exclamations. Not even the birth of a girl marred their pleasure.

"Was it bad for the nation?" questioned the people, "that King Ludvic had no sons, and that the kingdom had passed into the hands of Yadviga? Thanks to her marriage with Yagello, the power and the wealth of the kingdom were doubled. Thus it will be now. Where could another such ruler be found as our Queen shall be? Not even the Roman Cæsar, nor any of the other emperors possessed such a great country, such broad lands, such vast numbers of brave knights! The hand of the young princess will be sought by the most powerful monarchs on earth, who will come from the end of the world to make their bow to the King and Queen, her parents, while we, merchants and artisans, will reap a rich harvest, not mentioning even the probability of some other kingdom, that of Czechia or Hungary, being annexed to ours."

Such was the conversation of the merchants and artisans, and the rejoicings of the masses grew every moment. Private houses and public inns were the scenes of gay festivities. The market square was illuminated by lanterns and torches. In the suburbs the farmers from beyond Cracow camped beside their wagons. The Jews held council in their synagogues. The square was in an uproar almost till daybreak, especially around the courthouse and public markets, as in the days of large fairs. News was exchanged, messengers were sent to the palace for the latest reports, and throngs besieged them on their return.

The worst bit of information came in the shape of a rumor that Bishop Peter had baptized the baby that very night. This intelligence led to the natural conclusion that the new born babe was very weak. Experienced townswomen, however, asserted that there had been many cases where children prematurely born were saved to this world by a prompt christening. Therefore hope was strong with the loyal townsmen. They found solace and encouragement in the fact that the name of Bonifacia was to be attached to the other names chosen for the royal baby, and a Bonifacia, they asserted, was predestined to do good. Naturally no child can do much of either good or evil in the first years, the less so in the first days of its existence.

The next morning alarming news from the palace reached the town, which set the excited masses in a state of wildest confusion. It was rumored that the mother and child were both very low. In the numerous churches tremendous crowds prayed fervently all day long, and offerings of money, jewelry and costly stuffs were brought into the sanctuaries of the cathedrals, with pious appeals for the health of the Queen and her new-born daughter. Humble peasants, sad-faced and tear-stained, could be seen offering their pet lambs, chickens, wreaths of dried mushrooms, bushels of corn or baskets filled with nuts; while the wealthy knights, the merchants, the laborers and mechanics, all brought their mites, each according to his station and purse.

Couriers were dispatched to offer prayers in places famous for miracles having been performed there in the days of old. Astrologers consulted the stars. In the city of Cracow splendid processions were the order of the day. All the unions and brotherhoods laid aside their tools and participated in the parade. The town itself was

a picturesque mass of multi-colored banners. A procession of children followed the parade of their fathers, as it was hoped and believed that the prayers of the innocent little souls might obtain the mercy of God for the royal patients. The gates of the town were wide open, and enormous crowds entered the city from all parts of the country.

Thus the days passed on, amidst the incessant tolling of church bells, the tumult, the shouts, in and outside of the churches, amidst continuous processions; and when a week had elapsed, and the noble patient and her child were still among the living, a ray of hope once more penetrated the hearts of men.

It seemed improbable to the masses that God should call to Him the Queen who had done so much to glorify His name, who would die with the bitter consciousness of a life's work left uncompleted. His most devoted servant on earth, who had sacrificed her own happiness to convert to Christianity the only remaining pagan nation in Europe. The servants recalled how much she had done for the academies, the ministry—what she had sacrificed for the glory of God; the statesmen—her efforts to perpetuate peace between Christian monarchs; lawyers—for justice; the poor and weak—her generosity for the low and the wretched; and no one would believe that a life so absolutely necessary for the welfare of the kingdom and the entire world, was destined to be ended so abruptly.

On the thirteenth day of July the ringing of the funeral bells announced the death of the new-born child.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

Once more the town was in an uproar; hope gave place to alarm, and again the fearing, trembling masses surrounded the palace, eagerly waiting for information about the health of their Queen. But no word of comfort was sent to them from the court to cheer their saddened hearts, and the faces of all that passed to and from the palace were gloomy and mournful, growing darker and sadder every day.

It was rumored that the priest Stanislaw of Skarbuier, master of free arts and sciences in Cracow, did not leave the bed chamber of the Queen, who partook of the last sacrament daily. It was further asserted that after every communion her chamber was illuminated with a bright, heavenly light.

Some of the more fortunate citizens managed to get near the window of the Queen's chamber, and obtain a view of her pale face, which rather embittered their loyal hearts, for it was plain that for the august sufferer earthly existence was nearing its end. And yet even then there were those among the faithful citizens who cheered themselves with the faint hope that the wrath of merciful Heaven would be appeased with one sacrifice.

Unfortunately, their hopes suddenly gave way to despair. On Friday, the seventeenth of July, the masses were thunderstruck by the news that the Queen was dying.

Whoever had breath sufficient left in him to make the journey, hastened to the palace. The town was almost deserted; there remained only the cripples and the disabled; for even mothers carrying their infants in their arms hurriedly passed the gates. The stores were closed; the preparation of food was abandoned. The wheels of commerce and industry stopped, and instead of its incessant buzz and whirl, before the palace there was one black sea of men—a restless, terrified but speechless sea.

Thirteen hours after the noon bell had rung, in the dome of the cathedral the bells were ringing once more. At first its meaning was a mystery to the eager masses, but a vague alarm seized the men in front. Heads and eyes were immediately turned to the dome, to the still swaying, trembling bell, the mournful wail of which found an echo all over town. It was repeated instantly by the church bells of the Franciscan, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and from one end of the town to the other. At last all understood the fatal meaning of those heartrending wails. The hearts of that black, swinging sea of humanity were filled with such a despair, with such a commiseration, such intense suffering, as if the bell tongues found echoes in the very hearts of the gathered men and women.

Suddenly there appeared on the dome a black flag with a large death-head in the centre, under which were outlined on a white background, in the form of a cross, two human skulls.

All hope at once vanished. The Queen had expired.

The palace and its vicinity were the scenes of pathetic demonstrations of popular grief. The cries of children, the weeping of women, the groans and wails of a hundred thousand men deeply affected, mingled with the solemn, awful ringing of the bells.

Some threw themselves down in the midst of the waving sea of horror-stricken men, tore their garments, scratched their hands and faces, and inflicted bleeding wounds; others, in speechless stupor, stared blankly at the walls; some moaned, stretched their hands forward to the cathedral and to the chamber of the Queen, and prayed for miracles and the mercy of God.

But among these despairing wails and fervent prayers were also heard angry voices from persons whose mute despair had driven them to sacrilege.

"Why was our Queen taken from us? Of what use were all our processions, our prayers, or offerings of gold and silver—our tears and sacrifices—all in vain! They took everything, and gave us nothing in return!"

Others, amid tears and wails, continuously repeated aloud in voices of despair:

"Christ! Christ! Christ!"

The masses rushed to enter the palace, to have a last look at the beloved features of the Queen, but admission was denied them.

It was promised that the body would soon be laid in state at the cathedral, where every one was free to view the remains of her who was lost to a kingdom that had worshipped her.

Toward evening the mourning throngs began their return to the city. On their way home, men related to each other the touching incidents connected with the last moments of the Queen, exchanging views on the miracles that were certain to reveal themselves at the funeral, and near her grave. It was further claimed that the Queen would be canonized immediately; and when some incredulous mourners dared to express their doubts on the matter the crowd grew indignant, and the doubters were threatened with violence.

A deep gloom hung over the whole town, and the entire country, and seemed not only to the masses but to those on a higher level of society, that with the death of the Queen the lucky star of the kingdom had set forever in darkness. Even among the magnates of Cracow there were those who looked upon the future of their country

with evil forebodings. The questions most frequently asked were these:

"What will happen now? Has Yagello a right to rule the kingdom, now that the Queen is dead? Will he return to his Lithuania, and mount again the throne of the grand Prince? Some predicted—and very aptly—that Yagello himself would resign the high office he held and in such a contingency vast and rich territories would be likely to secede from the united kingdom, and again there would begin concerted attacks from restless Lithuania on their former allies, and a war of destruction and revenge would result. The Order would grow stronger, the Roman Cæsar and the King of Hungary would raise their bowed heads; and the kingdom of Poland, until yesterday one of the most powerful monarchies, would face ruin and humiliation.

The merchants, to whom heretofore the fertile regions of Lithuania and Russia afforded free and open markets, foreseeing speedy decline and reverses, were anxious to see Yagello hold the reins of government in his brawny hands; but even they could not but admit that a fierce war with the Order would follow.

It was known that for years dogs of war had been kept muzzled by the Queen. The masses recalled that once, aroused to indignation by the shameless greed and rapacity of the Crusaders, she, with her heavenly gift of prophesying, said unto them:

"As long as I live, I will control the arm and righteous wrath of my husband; but remember, that after my death severe and just punishment will overtake you for your sins."

But they, in their pride and blindness, feared not the horrors of war, reckoning that with death of the Queen the fascination, the halo of her saintliness, would vanish, and not prevent any longer the coming of volunteers from western lands to swell the ranks of the Crusaders—that thousands of warriors from Germany, Burgundia, France and more distant lands, would come to their aid.

But the death of Yadwiga had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that the envoy of the Crusaders, Thomtur, not even waiting for the arrival of the absent King, hastened to return to Marlborg in order to report to the Grand Master the important and even threatening news. The Hungarian, Ragusan and Czechian envoys followed on his trail, or dispatched couriers to their monarchs.

Yagello returned to Krakow, burdened by despair. At

the first meeting he announced to the magnates that he was not disposed to remain a king without a queen, and would return to his estates in Lithuania. Then he became as one petrified with grief, refused to consider affairs of state, left all questions unanswered, and from time to time was tortured by vehement fits of anger and remorse at himself that he had gone away and was not with the Queen in her last moments—that he had not heard her last wish and command.

In vain were the assurances of Stanislaw of Skarbonis and Bishop Wisz, that the Queen had been suddenly taken ill, and that he would have had ample opportunity to return in time had it not been for the premature birth of the child.

All their eloquent persuasion, however, did not console him, nor did they lessen his grief in the least.

"Without her I am not a king," was his response to the bishop, "but merely a repenting sinner, who knows no consolation."

Then in deep dejection he bowed his head, gazed reflectively upon the ground, and not a word more escaped his lips.

In the meantime the thoughts of all were occupied with the funeral of the Queen. New crowds of magnates from all parts of the world began to gather in Cracow, all sorts and conditions of men—noblemen, merchants and beggars, the latter in hopes of a great harvest of alms, which usually were lavishly distributed at the funeral ceremonies of the nobility.

The body of the Queen was transferred to the cathedral, the casket being arranged on an elevated platform in such manner that the head of it was much higher than the other extremity. This was done in order to afford the masses a view of the Queen's face.

In the cathedral continuous services were held. Around the casket burned thousands of wax candles, and amidst this glare, and a profusion of rare flowers, she lay, calm, bright, peaceful, like a beautiful white rose, with her hands crossed on her breast.

Men worshiped her as a saint possessed of supernatural curative powers, and sent to her maniacs, cripples and diseased children; and while the constant influx of visitors filled the church with their cries and prayers here and there a mother holding her sick babe in her arms would proclaim her thanks aloud, noticing the healthy flush returning to the pale, haggard face of the innocent

little sufferer; or those who had entered the edifice with the despair of paralyzed invalids, would suddenly emit exclamations of joy and gratitude, feeling new vigor in their benumbed organs.

Then it was that the hearts of the multitude were seized with a religious awe and tremor; the news of the miracle spread with the speed of wildfire over the church, over the palace, over the entire city, and attracted new and vast throngs which could only hope for salvation in a miracle.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

Zbishko, during this eventful period, was entirely forgotten. Who, in the face of such a great calamity, could remember an ordinary youth and his imprisonment in a palace tower. But Zbishko knew, from the guards of his prison, of the Queen's illness; he had heard the tumult round the palace, and when the ominous ringing of bells and loud cries of men and women came to his ears, he knelt on the floor of his cell and, remembering his own fate, poured out his whole soul lamenting the untimely death of the Queen.

The echo of the funeral procession, the ringing of bells, and the cries of the multitude reached him during the entire week.

During all these days he sat in his cell gloomy and full of despair. He became thin, ceased to partake of food, sleep came not to bring oblivion to his weary senses, and he paced his underground cell like a wild beast in his cage.

Solitude bore heavily upon him. There were days when the guard neglected to bring him fresh bread and water, so deeply absorbed were all minds with the funeral of the Queen. From the moment of her death no one visited him, not even the Princess, Danusia, nor Powala of Tatchow, who had heretofore shown him so many favors, nor the merchant Amiley, the friend of Matzko.

Zbishko thought sorrowfully that with the departure of the latter the world had ceased to remember him. At times the terrible thought tortured his mind that even law might forget him, and then he would remain in this vile dungeon till the end of his days. And then he began to pray and beg for death.



At last when a whole month had passed after the Queen had been laid to rest, and another had begun its slow course he was tortured by doubts regarding the return of Matzko. For had not Matzko promised not to spare his steed, and to return with great haste? Marlborg was not at the other end of the world. In twelve weeks one could easily go there and come back, especially when the case was one of importance.

"But perhaps Matzko has found other business to absorb his time and attention," thought Zbishko. "Perhaps he has caught the eye of some woman on the road and he is now escorting her to Bogdanetz to install her as its mistress in his home, and there await posterity; while I will have to rot here an age, until God will have mercy upon my wretched soul."

At length he lost track of time, ceased to talk to his guards, and only by the cobwebs that covered with a fine curtain the iron grates of his window he surmised that autumn was nigh.

For hours and hours Zbishko sat on his bed, with his elbows on his knees, his fingers in his thick curls, which had grown so long that they hung over his shoulders; and half conscious almost stupefied, he did not lift his head even when the guard addressed him, bringing his daily ration of prison fare.

But once the hinges of the iron door suddenly emitted a strange, shrill sound, and a familiar voice called:

"Zbishko!"

"Uncle!" cried Zbishko, in response, suddenly bounding from his bed.

Matzko embraced the blonde head of his nephew with both hands, and covered his brow with passionate kisses. Sorrow, grief and a strange yearning possessed the heart of the unfortunate youth, and he began to sob on the breast of his uncle like a homesick child.

"I thought you would never return!" said he, the tears coursing down his cheeks.

"I thought so myself," replied Matzko.

Zbishko, raised his head, looked at Matzko, and exclaimed:

"What has happened to you?"

He gazed and stared with amazement at the emaciated face, pale as a sheet, at the bent figure and the gray hair of the warrior.

"What has happened to you?" repeated he.

Matzko sat down on the bed, and for a few moments breathed heavily.

"What has happened to me?" he finally said. "Barely had I crossed the frontier when I was shot from an ambush in the woods. Bandit knights, you know. I can hardly breathe now. God sent me timely relief, or else you should have never seen me again."

"Who saved you?"

"Yurand of Spichow, the father of Danusia," answered Matzko. A long pause followed. "They attacked me," resumed Matzko, "and within twelve hours afterwards he attacked them, and scarcely one-half of them escaped with their lives. He took me with him to his castle in Spichow, and there for three long weeks we fought death. God did not wish me to die just yet, and though I am still dangerously ill, He in His mercy returned me to life."

"Then you have not been in Marlborg?"

"How could I?" They robbed me of all I possessed. They took away the letters and other necessary articles. I returned to ask Princess Alexandra for another letter, but I missed her on the road. She went in another direction; and whether I will now find my way to her I don't know, for it's time for me to prepare myself for the other world."

With these words he spat on his palm and held out his hand to Zbishko, who saw on it drops of blood.

"Do you see it?" asked Matzko; and a moment later he added: "It's all the will of God!"

For some time both Matzko and Zbishko, overcome by emotion and the weight of their own gloomy thoughts, spoke not a word. Finally Zbishko said:

"Are you constantly spitting blood?"

"How can I help it, when half of the bandit's lance pierced my ribs? So would you, I assure you. At the house of Yurand of Spichow I improved somewhat, but now I am utterly exhausted, for the journey has been a long one, and I covered it speedily."

"What was the use of haste?"

"I wished to meet Princess Alexandra, and get from her another letter. Said Yurand of Spichow: 'Go to Cracow, and return to Spichow with the letter. I have in my underground cell a few captive Germans. I will release one of them on his word of a knight, and he shall carry your message to the Grand Master.'"

"Yurand always has a number of them in his dungeon, for he has never ceased avenging the death of his wife.

Their moans, the clanging of their chains as they pace their dreary cells, are like music to his ears, for he is a terrible man. Do you understand?"

"I do. I am only astonished that you should have lost the first letter; for if Yurand captured your assailants your letter was surely found with them."

"He did not capture all of them; about five of the bandits made their escape. It was a very unfortunate affair."

Matzko spat blood again, and pressed his hand to his breast, moaning pitifully, as if from intense pain.

"You are in a perilous plight, I see," said Zbishko. "How came you to be wounded? Was it an ambuscade?"

"Yes, from behind bushes that were so thick and dense that nothing could be discerned a yard away. I traveled without my armor, having been assured by merchants that the region was safe. The weather was very sultry, besides."

"Who led the bandits—a Crusader?"

"No, but he was a German—Chemonitchik of Lentz, notorious for his daring robberies and murders."

"What became of him?"

"He is now in Yurand's dungeon, chained and fettered. But the ruffian has in his own castle two captive Polish knights, two scions of the nobility, whom he offers as a ransom in exchange for his own head."

Again silence reigned for a few moments.

"Oh, Lord!" murmured Zbishko at length. "Lichtenstein will enjoy life and so will the other German of Lentz, while we must die shameful deaths with no one to avenge us. My head will fall at the block, while your career will surely be ended before the winter is over."

"Ah, I will hardly last till winter. If I could only save you, I could die happy."

"Have you seen anybody of note here since your return?"

"I paid a visit the Castellan of Cracow; for as soon as I was informed of Lichtenstein's departure, I thought that the authorities would grant you a pardon."

"Then Lichtenstein is gone?"

"Immediately after the death of the Queen was heralded, he departed for Marlborg. I pleaded with the Castellan, but to all my entreaties he replied: 'Your nephew will forfeit his head, not because we desire to please Lichtenstein, but because such is his sentence; and whether Lichtenstein is here or not, matters little. Were

Lichtenstein to die to-morrow the fact of his demise would not change Zbishko's fate; for law,' says he, 'is not a coat which you can turn inside out to suit the occasion. The King can pardon him, and no one else.'"

"And where is the King?"

"Soon after the Queen's funeral he passed the gates of Cracow and went into the heart of Russia."

"Then, of course, nothing more can be done."

"Nothing. The Castellan further said: 'I am sincerely sorry for the youth, for Princess Anna takes a warm interest in his fate; but what I can not do I can not.'"

"And Princess Anna, is she here yet?"

"Yes, God bless her! Such a kind, generous soul she is. She is here because Yurand's daughter is ailing, and the Princess loves her as if she were her own child."

"Oh, God! Then Danusia, too, has not escaped our misery! What ails her?"

"Who knows? The Princess says that it is the work of an evil eye."

"It's the work of Lichtenstein! No one else but he—the son of a dog!"

"It must be his work. But what can you do to him? Nothing—absolutely nothing."

"Ah, this is the reason why I have been left here, neglected and forgotten, because she, my Danusia, is sick."

Zbishko began to pace his cell with long strides; then he suddenly seized the hand of Matzko, kissed it tenderly, and said:

"God will repay you for all you have done for me. You are dying for my sake. I know it. But since you have ventured into Prussia for me, grant me one more request before you are laid up for good. Go to the Castellan, and plead with him that he should parole me on my word of honor for three short months, after which I will return, and pay with my head for the crime of which I have been convicted. But it can not be—it is impossible—that we should both perish without revenge. I will at once go to Marlburg and send a challenge to Lichtenstein. It cannot be otherwise. Either he will die or I."

Matzko passed his hand over his forehead.

"The service you ask I will eagerly perform," said he; "but will the Castellan relent?"

"I will give him my honest word as a knight. For three months, not a day more."

"This is nonsense! Three months, indeed. And if you

should be wounded, and unable to return, what would they think of you then?"

"I will crawl on all fours, but return I will on the day set. Do not fear, uncle. And, besides, by that time the King may return from Russia, we can fall at his feet again and beg for mercy."

"That is true," admitted Matzko. But a moment later he added: "The Castellan also remarked, 'Owing to the death of the Queen we almost forgot your nephew; but now this affair must be settled.'"

"He will yield! He will consent!" insisted Zbishko, full of hope. "He knows that a true knight never breaks his word; and whether my head is removed now, or after Michaelmas day, it's all the same to him."

"I will see him to-day!"

"To-day go to the house of your friend Amiley and there rest yourself a while that something of a healing nature is applied to your wounds; and to-morrow go to the Castellan."

"I will, with God's aid!"

"God bless you!"

Uncle and nephew embraced each other, and Matko went toward the door, but on the threshold - he halted, wrinkled his brow, as if trying to recall something that tormented him.

"You are not wearing the belt of a knight yet, Zbishko. Lichtenstein may tell you that he does not wish to meet an unbelted knight. And what will you do then?"

Zbishko became alarmed, but for one brief moment only. Then he said: "And how is it in time of war? Must belted knight fight only unbelted warriors?"

"That is war, my lad, not a duel. This is not one and the same thing."

"True; but wait; we must think of something to help us carry through our plan. After a few moment's reflection an idea of some importance seemed to come to him, and he exclaimed: "We can help it! Prince Yanoush will grant me the honor of a belt. If the Princess Anna and Danusia will ask him, he will surely do it. And on the way from Cracow to Marlborg I will challenge the son of Nicholas of Dlugolias."

"Why?"

"Because Nicholas, the old man, who belongs to the court of the Princess, and is nicknamed 'Club,' called Danusia a 'chicken.'"

Matzko gazed at Zbishko with astonishment. The latter, wishing to explain matters, continued:

"I can not forgive that insult; yet I will not battle with Nicholas, for he is over eighty."

"Listen, my lad," replied Matzko. "I am sorry for your head, but not for your brains—for you have none to lose; you are as stupid as a goat."

"Why are you angry?"

Matzko made no response and turned to leave the cell but Zbishko rushed toward him with questions:

"Is Danusia dangerously ill? Do not be angry. You have not been with me for so long a time."

And he bent again to the hand of his uncle and kissed it, while the latter shrugged his shoulders, but answered calmly and soberly:

"The daughter of Yurand is not seriously indisposed, though she is not permitted to leave her chambers. Farewell!"

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## CHAPTER XIX.

Zbishko was left alone. He felt as if regenerated, body and soul, with a fountain of new hope springing up in his heart. He delighted in thinking that he was likely to secure a respite of three more months of life, and that he would make a journey into distant lands, find Lichtenstein and engage him in a combat for life and death. At the mere thought of this boundless joy filled his heart. How pleasant it would be even for three short months, to feel under oneself a fleet steed, to roam over the wide world, to fight and not die unavenged? And later on let come what might—for three months was after all such a long time—perhaps before it expired the King would return from Russia and forgive his crime. War might be declared—a war which all predicted long since. Perhaps the Castellan himself, on beholding the conqueror of the haughty Lichtenstein, would say:

"Go ye into the free fields and woods! You are a prisoner no more!"

Zbishko clearly felt that no one except the Crusader ever bore malice against him; that even the most severe of his judges, the Castellan of Cracow, sentenced him to death only through a sense of duty.

The hope that heals the sorest wounds buoyed up his sunken spirits, and he doubted no more that the three

months of freedom would surely be granted him. He even thought that more time would be given, for the idea of a knight failing to keep his pledge would never enter the mind of the old knight of Teuchin.

When, at twilight the next day, Matzko came, Zbishko ran to meet him and eagerly inquired:

"Did he give his permission?"

Matzko seated himself on the bed. He was too weak to stand. After resting for a moment or two he finally said:

"The Castellan has given his decision. 'If,' said he, 'you wish to divide your lands or your wealth, I will release your nephew for one or two weeks, on his word as a knight; but not a moment longer shall I grant him.'"

Zbishko was so amazed that for some time he could not utter a word:

"For two weeks!" he finally gasped out the words, "It would take more than one week to reach the frontier! Did you not tell the Castellan that it is my wish to go to Marlborg?"

"I have not been alone in my entreaties, for Princess Anna joined me, for your sake."

"Well, and what was the result?"

"The result? The old man told her that he was sorry for you; that he pitied you. 'Would that I had the right,' said he, 'to find some law, some plausible excuse, I would release him for all time. But what I can not do, I can not. No good,' said he, 'will ever come to a kingdom in which men close their eyes to the law, and pardon each other's shortcomings for friendship's sake. I would not do it if the head of my own relative, of my own brother, were at stake; and furthermore,' said he, 'we do not think much of the Crusaders; but to disgrace ourselves before them would be ridiculous. What would they think were I to release a knight condemned to death, to give him a chance to challenge them to a duel? Would they believe that the culprit would forfeit his life for his crime after all, or that justice still exists in our kingdom? Far better to cut off one head than to disgrace the King and the kingdom.'

To this the Princess made reply that the sort of justice astonishes her which forbids even the nearest relative of the King to save a man's life; but the old man was stubborn. Said he: 'Mercy alone is at the service of the King, but not lawlessness.' And they began to dispute

and quarrel, for the Princess grew angry. 'Do not let him rot in his vile dungeon,' said she; 'make an end of his miserable existence.' 'Very well,' answered the Castellan; 'I will order a scaffold built on the square to-morrow.' And thus they parted. Now God alone, in His mercy, can save you!"

A deep silence followed.

"How soon will the execution take place?" suddenly asked Zbishko.

"Within two or three days. If there is no salvation we must submit to this will. I did what I could. I threw myself at the feet of the Castellan; I begged for mercy; but he repeated his old song: 'Find me a law or an excuse for pardoning him, and I will not hesitate a moment.' But what can I find? I visited the priest Vladislav of Skarbmir, requested him to come and see you. Let the honor be yours that the same priest attended your last moments who saw the Queen breathing her last. But to-day I was unable to find him at home; he was at the house of Princess Anna."

"May be with Danusia?"

"Very likely. The maiden is improving rapidly. I will call on him again to-morrow. They say that after a confession to him the salvation of your soul is as assured as if it were with you in a traveling bag."

Zbishko was seated, his elbows on his knees, his head bent so low that his long curls hid his face entirely. For a few moments the old knight gazed at him in silence, then he began to call in a whisper:

"Zbishko! Zbishko!"

The youth raised his head, and his face bore rather a malicious than a painful expression.

"Well, what?"

"Listen attentively. Maybe I have hit on something." With these words he came nearer to Zbishko and began to whisper: "Have you heard of Prince Withold—how he was once imprisoned by our present King, and walked out a free man, disguised in the dress of a woman? There is no woman here that would be willing to remain here in your place, but you may take my cloak, boots, helmet, and walk out. Do you understand? You will not be recognized. You will not be examined. The jailors saw me going out last night, but no one looked in my face, no one cared to honor me with attention. Be silent, and listen. Your custodians will find me here to-morrow, and what then? Will they cut off my head? How ridiculous! Have I more



than two or three weeks to linger in this world? And you—as soon as you leave these gates, mount your steed and go at once to Prince Withold. You will make your bow, remind him of your past services, and he will receive you cordially and you shall be as safe as if you were with Christ himself. Here rumor has it that the army of the Prince has been conquered by the Tartars. It is doubtful, but possible, for the late Queen predicted it. If it is true, then it is evident that the Prince is in need of brave knights, and will welcome you into his ranks. If so, you must cling to him, for there is not a better service in the whole world. When other kings lose their battles their whole existence comes to an abrupt end; but Prince Withold is so cunning, so enterprising that after every defeat his power increases wonderfully. And, besides, he is a generous man, and fond of men. Tell him the whole story. Tell him that you wished to follow him against the Tartars, but could not leave your cell. God will grant your plea. The Prince will reward you lavishly with lands, serfs—will give you the belt of a knight, and plead your cause before the King. He is a good advocate. You shall see.”

Zbishko listened in silence, and Matzko, as if encouraged and persuaded by his own words, continued:

“Fate will not permit you to die so young! You must return to Bogdanetz. And when that happy day comes, take a wife and preserve our noble name. And only, in years to come, when a large family of children shall grace your house, you may challenge Lichtenstein, and fight him till death decides which is the better man. But until then, seek not revenge, for if you are attacked, shot down somewhere in Prussia, like I was, you are lost forever! Take my cloak, then, and lose no time. Here is my head covering. Prepare for instant departure, and trust yourself to God!”

Matzko rose to his feet and began to undress; but Zbishko also rose, stopped him from disrobing and said:

“I shall not do what you have proposed, so help me God, and the holy cross.”

“Why?” asked Matzko in amazement.

“Because I shall not do it.”

Matzko became deadly pale with excitement and wrath.

“Would that you had never seen the light of day!”

“Have you not already spoken to the Castellan?” asked Zbishko. “Did you not offer him your head in exchange for mine?”

"How do you know it?"

"The knight of Tatchow told me about it."

"Well, what of it?"

"What? Did not the Castellan declare to you that the disgrace would fall not upon my head, but upon our whole future race? Would not the disgrace be more intense, were I to flee like a coward, and leave the law to avenge itself on you?"

"What law? What can any law do to a dying man? For Heaven's sake, be reasonable."

"I am reasonable, and therefore indisposed to act a coward's part. May God punish me if I leave you here, an old, sick, suffering man. The very thought of it is disgraceful!"

Again silence reigned, broken only by the hard breathing of Matzko and the calling of the guards at the outer gates. Night had come and darkness was everywhere.

"Listen!" finally resumed Matzko, his voice broken and trembling with emotion. "There can be no disgrace in fleeing to the aid of Prince Withold; nor will there be any for you."

"Ah!" sadly answered Zbishko, "you know that Prince Withold is a grand prince. He has a crown which he received from the King's hands; he has authority, power, wealth; but I am a poor knight—all I possess is my honor." And a moment later he added full of anger: "And do you not understand that I love you, that I will not sacrifice your head for mine!"

Matzko raised himself on his weak legs, stretched out his hands, and—though by nature men of those days were not much given to the display of emotion—he suddenly uttered a heartrending cry:

"Zbishko!"

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## CHAPTER XX.

The next day the street arabs began to gather on the piles of planks and boards intended for the scaffold, which was to be built opposite the main gates of the City Hall. The Princess, however, did not give up the struggle entirely, but necessarily consulted Baitzech Yastumski, Stanislav of Skarbmir, and several other celebrities who were well versed in the laws and traditions of the age. She was prompted and inspired by

the words of the Castellan, who had declared that if a law, or a mere plausible pretext, could be discovered which would justify the release of Zbishko, he would cause his immediate release.

The wise men held long and profound consultations, and raked their inventive minds for some legal loophole through which Zbishko might escape, and though Priest Stanislav had given to the prisoner all the religious comforts due to a true Christian in his last moments, he went from the prison back to the meeting, which lasted almost till break of day.

Meanwhile, the day of Zbishko's doom had come. From early morning crowds of people began to assemble on the square, for the execution of the knight was the sensation of the hour; and, besides the weather was ideal.

It became known among the interested groups of women that the condemned man was young and handsome, and soon the entire thoroughfare leading to the square was bright with the colors of the gay attire of throngs of townswomen. Almost every window in the vicinity was adorned by a protruding head in a dainty bonnet, or golden and velvet head ornaments, while from other windows gazed upon the scene young rustic maids, their heads crowned with wreaths of roses and lilies.

The city dignitaries came out in force, and to assert their own importance, established themselves near the scaffold, right behind the knights. The latter, to honor their unfortunate fellow knight, to show him their warm sympathy, stood around the block in a close circle.

Behind them swarmed the masses, merchants and artisans, with their union banners; school children and street urchins circled amid the enormous throng, running forward and backward, like flies making their way wherever there was a bit of empty space.

Above this sea of human heads loomed the ghastly scaffold, covered with new cloth. On the platform there were but three dignitaries. One was the executioner, a broad-shouldered, severe-looking German, clad in a red cloak and headgear of similar tint, his right hand resting on the handle of a heavy double-edge axe. The others were two boys with bare arms, and ropes dangling from their belts. At their feet was a block and a coffin, also covered with cloth.

The bells of the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary were filling the town with their metallic ring and frightened away whole flocks of birds.

The masses gazed now at the street leading to the palace, then at the scaffold, and the executioner with his axe, which glistened in the bright rays of the sun; then again at the knights, whom the common folk always regarded with awe and respect. This time there were among them many men worthy of their esteem, for the most famous of warriors now formed a square around the scaffold.

The townsmen marveled at the broad shoulders and the superior dignity of Zaviska, the Black, at his curly hair, coming down his shoulders; they admired the iron-like, square figure of the Jandrom of Mashkovich; the enormous, almost unnatural figure of Paska Zladuga of Biskupitz; the stern face of Vaitzeck of Vodzink, and the beauty of Dobka of Olesnitzi, who had defeated twelve German knights at a tournament in town; and numbers of other knights, brave and bold, who had become famous for their noble deeds and feats of superhuman strength.

A good deal of attention was devoted to Matzko of Bogdanetz, with his pale, haggard face. He was supported by Florian of Koritnitz, and Martin of Vrotzimov. Matzko was generally taken for the father of the condemned.

But all eyes from time to time turned on Powala of Tatchow, who, standing in the first row, held the hand of Danusia, who looked like a fair vision, all in white with a green wreath crowning her golden curls.

The throng did not understand what that signified—why that frail little maiden in white was compelled to gaze upon the execution of a criminal. Some said that she was Zbishko's sister; others saw in her the choice of his heart; but no one could satisfactorily explain her strange attire, nor account for her presence at the execution. In the hearts of all her tear-stained face aroused profound sympathy.

In the ranks of the spectators idle curiosity gave place to outspoken dissatisfaction with the Castellan, who remained unmoved to all the pleadings and complaints about the severity of the law. From time to time the voices became loud and threatening, and at last, here and there the sentiment was voiced that if the scaffold and block were destroyed the execution would perforce be postponed.

The masses became animated as this idea was circulated. From mouth to mouth passed the intelligence that

were the King present he would surely pardon the youth, who, many were convinced, had committed no crime whatever.

But silence reigned supreme, when distant cries announced the approach of the royal guards, escorting the condemned. Soon the procession appeared on the square. It was led by the brotherhood of undertakers, clad in long black cloaks, touching the ground, and with similar hoods, leaving only openings for the eyes, but covering the rest of the face. The masses feared these sombre figures, and at sight of them became silent. They were followed by a detachment of troops, composed of picked Lithuanians, clad in fox-skin cloaks. These were the royal guards.

Behind this detachment could be seen the axes of another division, and in the centre, between the court clerk (whose duty it was to read the sentence) and Priest Stanislav of Skarbmir, bearing a crucifix, marched Zbishko.

The eyes of all were immediately turned upon him, and from all windows and elevated points from which a view could be had women craned their necks.

Zbishko was dressed in his white mantle, embroidered with gold, and in this bright attire he seemed to the people a famous prince, or a youth belonging to an illustrious name. By his stature, by his shoulders outlined distinctly from under his outer garment, he would be taken for an adult, save for his head, which looked boyish—a youthful face with the first growth of hair on his upper lip; in short, the face of a royal page, with golden curls, cut short on the forehead and hanging down his back over his shoulders.

He marched at a steady, even gait, but his face was pale. From time to time he stared at the crowd as if struggling with slumber; then he would raise his clear eyes to the bellfries of the churches, to the flocks of sparrows, to the swaying, trembling bells, which informed him that his last moment was near.

His face bore an expression of amazement. He seemed to wonder that all those solemn ringing of bells, the cries of women, all that solemn pomp was intended for him.

At last his eyes discovered the scaffold on the square, and on it the red figure of the executioner. He trembled, and made the sign of the cross, while the priest handed him the crucifix to kiss it.

Suddenly a bunch of violets fell at his feet, thrown by a young girl in the crowd. Zbishko bent down for it, and smiled at the girl, who at once burst into loud lamentations.

These cries caused him to shudder for a moment; but he thought that in the presence of this vast multitude many of whom were waving to him their kerchiefs from the windows, he must die bravely, and leave behind him the recollection of a brave lad. Accordingly, he collected all his strength of body and power of will, brushed aside his rebellious curls, raised his head higher, and marched boldly, like a conqueror at the triumphant close of the tournament.

The procession moved slowly, for the crowds grew denser and denser, and reluctantly made way for the guards.

In vain cried the advance Lithuanian guards:

"Ezk szalin! Ezk szalin!" (Clear the road!)

The people did not wish to understand the meaning of those words, and the crowds increased in density every moment. Though the population of Cracow in those days comprised fully two-thirds of Germans, the air was filled with curses against the Crusaders:

"Disgrace! Disgrace! May the Crusaders perish, these wolves in human guise, if to satisfy them mere children must be sacrificed! They are a disgrace to the King and to the kingdom!"

The Lithuanians, fearing intervention and riot, removed their bows and arrows from their shoulders and looked suspiciously at the people around them, not daring to shoot, however, until ordered.

Their captain sent out an advance guard of soldiers with axes, who soon succeeded in clearing the way, and at length the head of the procession came up close to the knights, that surrounded the platform.

The knights opened their ranks without a murmur. First came the soldiers, followed by Zbishko, the priest and the court clerk; but at that moment something happened which no one anticipated or expected.

From the ranks of the knights there suddenly stepped out Powala, holding Danusia in his powerful arms, and cried:

"Halt!"

The command was uttered in such a thundering voice that all who heard it remained still and speechless for the moment, as if rooted in the ground. Not even the

captain, much less his soldiers, dared to resist the noble knight, who had been seen daily in the palace holding friendly conversations with the King.

At length, encouraged by the effect of Powala's command, other distinguished knights began to exclaim in imperious tones: "Halt! Halt!" while the knight of Tatchow approached Zbishko and presented Danusia to him.

The prisoner, thinking that she was to remain with him for a few precious moments of leave-taking, rapturously embraced her, and pressed her to his heart.

But Danusia, instead of clinging to him, and encircling his neck with her graceful arms quickly tore a white veil from under the wreath of flowers crowning her head, and with it covered the head of Zbishko.

"You are mine! You are mine!" she ejaculated at the top of her childish voice: "You are mine!"

"You belong to her!" echoed the powerful knights. "To the Castellan! To the Castellan!"

The priest lifted his eyes to heaven, the court clerk became confused and perplexed.

"Then the captain and his soldiers lowered their arms, for they all understood what had happened.

There existed an ancient Polish custom, strong as the law itself, and known in Cracow and out of it, to the effect that if a pure and innocent maiden throws her veil over a condemned criminal, as a sign that she desires to marry him, she saves him from impending execution.

This ancient custom was widely known to the knights, the merchants, the farmers, the Polish townsmen. Even the Germans had heard of its sacredness, having lived with the Polish for centuries.

Old Matzko almost fainted from excitement, while the knights, pushing aside the guards, surrounded Zbishko and Danusia.

The excited and rejoicing masses in the meantime shouted:

"To the Castellan! To the Castellan!" And, like a vast ocean wave, the masses moved.

The executioner and his assistants disappeared none too soon. In an instant pandemonium broke loose. It became clear to every one that if the Castellan would still resist a custom made sacred by centuries, his conduct would be the signal for riots throughout the town.

Without warning that immense sea of people rushed toward the scaffold. In an instant the cloth was torn from the platform, rent into fragments and scattered far

and wide. Strong hands attacked the boards and planks. Axes were used, the crashing of timber was heard, and in a few minutes there was not a sign left of the scaffold or its horrible block.

Zbishko, still holding Danusia in his arms, returned to the palace—this time, indeed, marching like a conquering hero. Round him, with beaming faces swarmed the first knights of the kingdom; thousands of men, women and children, shouting, singing, shedding tears of joy, and stretching their hands to Danusia, lavish in their praises of both for their beauty and bravery.

From the windows along the route the wealthy maidens clapped their white hands; on all sides were seen smiling faces, eyes filled with tears of gratitude. A veritable rain of roses, lilies, a rain of ribbons and golden belts and nets, fell at the feet of the fortunate youth; while he, bright as the first ray of the morning sun, his heart overflowing with gratitude, raised Danusia high up in his arms, and in ecstasy kissed her knees, which proceeding moved the town maidens to such extent that they threw themselves into the arms of their sweethearts, wishing to prove by their conduct that had they been in Danusia's place their sweethearts' heads would have been just as safe.

Zbishko and Danusia suddenly became the beloved, idolized children of the knighthood, of the townsmen and the common masses.

Old Matzko still led by Florian and Martin, almost became insane from joy and amazement, for the possibility of such a rescue had never entered his mind.

And Powala of Tatchow, amid the general tumult and excitement in his thundering voice related to an attentive audience how this plan had been discovered and decided upon at a meeting at which were present the Princess, Voitzech Yostrejembrik and Stanislav of Skarbmir—men well versed in all matters pertaining to law and letters.

The knights marveled at the simplicity of the discovery, saying that the ancient custom had been forgotten by all, because the town had a preponderance of Germans, who had never availed themselves of its beneficial results.

But Zbishko's safety was not yet assured. His liberty still depended on the Castellan.

The knights, heading the masses, marched to the palace, where, in the absence of the King, the Castellan



exercised authority. Immediately the court clerk, Stanislav of Skarbmir, Zavisha, Faruney, Jindorm of Moshkovitch, and Powala of Tatchow, went to him to inform him of Danusia's dramatic conduct in behalf of Zbishko—to remind him of the ancient custom, and also his promise that if a law or even excuse were found he would at once release the prisoner.

Could there be a law more sacred than this ancient usage, which no one had ever violated yet?

It is true, the Knight of Teuchin claimed that this custom had been more generally called into service by the masses, or in behalf of bandits or outlaws, but never had this custom been resorted to in the interest of the nobility. Yet the Castellan, who was familiar with all ancient customs and traditions, could not but recognize its binding force. The Castellan said this and other things with grave dignity, covering his gray beard with his hand, as if concealing a smile, for it was evident he was much pleased.

At length he came out on the low porch together with the Princess Anna Danuta, and a number of priests and knights. At sight of him Zbishko once more lifted up Danusia. The Castellan laid his wrinkled hand affectionately on her golden curls and slowly, significantly nodded his head.

This signal was understood, and the very walls of the palace trembled from the shouts and ejaculations.

Then the cries were augmented by others in honor of Danusia and Zbishko.

A moment later the young couple came out on the porch, threw themselves at the feet of the kind Princess Anna Danuta, who had saved Zbishko's life. It was she who, when every source of rescue had been exhausted, had hit upon the plan that had restored Zbishko to liberty. It was they who had taught Danusia her part.

"Long life to the young couple!" thundered Powala of Tatchow at the sight of the kneeling pair.

"Long life!" echoed the other knights. The gray bearded Castellan turned to the Princess and said:

"Most gracious Princess, the betrothal engagements must take place at once. Such is the demand of the tradition."

"The betrothal shall take place at once," answered the kind Princess with beaming face, but the wedding I will not sanction without the consent of her father—Yourand of Spichow."

## BOOK TWO.

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### CHAPTER I.

Zbishko and Matzko were consulting in the house of the merchant Amilei as to what they were to do. The old knight expected a speedy termination of his earthly career, which had been predicted to him by a Franciscan monk, an expert in the matter of wounds; hence he wished to return to Bogdanetz, where, in the Ostrovsky Cemetery, his ashes would find eternal rest beside his ancestors.

However, not all the "ancestors" reposed there. At one time they were a numerous race. When the wars were raging they were called together by the cry of "Gradii!" and on their escutcheon they bore the imprint of a blunt horseshoe. In the year 1331 in the battle of Plootzi the German archers killed seventy ogdanetz warriors. Voitzech alone remained—he who was nicknamed "The Bull," to whom Kink Vladislaus Loketek, by special edict, confirmed the coat-of-arms and the lands of Bogdanetz. Voitzech returned to his household gods only to meditate on the destruction of his race, for while the men of Bogdanetz were falling under the arrows of the Germans, predatory knights from adjacent Silesia fell upon their nest, burned their settlement to the ground and the inhabitants were either slaughtered or carried away to be sold into slavery in distant German lands. Voitzech remained alone, the owner of extensive but waste lands, which theretofore had belonged to all his people. Five years afterward he married, had two sons, Yasko and Matzko, and died impaled on the horns of a wild bull while hunting in the woods.

His son grew up under the protection of their mother, Kachna, of Splanitza, who in two expeditions against the Silesian Germans, avenged the old outrages, but perished in the third. Before the third expedition, however, she had built up, by the aid of slaves, a little town on the site of Bogdanetz,

which gave Yasko and Matzko a respectable standing. When Yasko became of age, he married Yagenka, of Motzajhev. Of this union Zbishko was born. Matzko remained a bachelor, looking after the estate and his nephew, so far as his military duties permitted it.

But when, during the war between the Nalenchans and the Grimolites, Bogdanetz was a second time reduced to ashes, and the peasants took flight, the lonely Matzko vainly strove to restore the old condition of things. After a few years' struggling, he finally hypothecated his lands to his kinsman, an abbot, and with Zbishko joined the Lithuanians in a war against the Germans.

He did not lose sight of Bogdanetz, however. In going to Lithuania his real intention was to redeem his lands with the spoils he expected to bring, people them with captives, build a city, and leave it in Zbishko's charge. Now, after Zbishko's fortunate escape, Matzko talked the matter over with him in the house of the merchant Amilei.

They had the means with which to redeem the lands. The spoils of war, the ransoms paid by captive knights and the gifts of Withold made a considerable sum. Matzko's combat with the Frisians especially brought him great returns. The weapons alone, which he obtained, in those days amounted to a fortune, not to mention the wagons, horses, captives, apparel, money and a very extensive train of military goods. Part of this booty was immediately bought by Amilei; among other things, two pieces of wonderful Flanders cloth, which the provident and rich Frisians carried with them.

In anticipation of the near approach of death, Matzko also sold the weapons he had captured in war. The armorer who bought them, on the following day sold them to Marcine, of Vrozhimovitz, with great profit to himself, as breast-plates of Milan manufacture were valued above any other article under the sun.

Zbishko was pained to see the breast-plate go.

"If God preserve your health," he said to his uncle, "where will you find another one like it?"

"Where I found this one—on the body of some other German," answered Matzko. "But I shall not escape death. The iron broke between my ribs, and there is a splinter in my body. I felt it and attempted to extract it with my nails, but pushed it only farther instead. There is no remedy now."

"A kettle or two of bear's fat might do you good."

"Yes, Father Tzypeck gave me the same advice—said that the splinter would somehow work itself out. But there is no

bear's fat to be had. Were I in Bogdanetz, I would take an axe and hide under the bee-hive."

"To Bogdanetz, then, let us go! But do not dally on the way."

This affected old Matzko, and he looked admiringly at his nephew.

"I know whither you would go—to the court of Prince Yanoush, or to Yurand of Spichow—to fight the Germans of Chelm."

"I shall not deny it. I would gladly go with the Princess' court to Warsaw or Tzechanow, in order to be at Danusia's side as long as possible. I cannot do without her now, because she is not only my lady, but also my love. When I see her, my heart flutters. I will follow her even to the end of the world, but my first duty is to you. You did not forsake me, and I shall not forsake you. To Bogdanetz, then!"

"You are a kind boy," said Matzko.

"I should be punished by God if I were not kind to you. You see the wagons are being prepared. I ordered hay to be placed in one for you. Amilei's wife gave us a good feather-bed, but I do not know if you will be able to use it, as it keeps one so warm. We shall drive slowly, with the Princess' court, that there may be people to look after you."

"I should like to live long enough to build a small town. I fear that after my death you will not care much for Bogdanetz."

"Why should I not?"

"Because your head is full of combats and amours."

"Were you not given to combats yourself? I have well considered what we are to do. First of all we will build the town of strong oak, then we will have a trench dug around it."

"Do you think that advisable?" asked Matzko, becoming interested. "Well, and when the town is built, what then? Proceed."

"Then I shall go to the Princess' court in Warsaw or to Tzechanow."

"After my death?"

"If you die soon, then after your death; but I shall first decently bury you, but if the Lord Jesus preserve you, then you will remain in Bogdanetz. The Princess promised to obtain for me a knight's belt from the Prince. Lichtenstein would not otherwise fight me."

"Then you will go to Malborg?"

"To Malborg or to the end of the world—wherever I can find Lichtenstein."

"I do not reproach you for that. Your death or his!"

"I will bring to Bogdanetz his glove and belt; you will see!"

"But beware of treachery. These people are not above it."

"I will salute Prince Yanoush and ask him to send a decree to Malorg under guard. The time is peaceful. I will take the decree to Malborg, where there are always a number of knights stopping. I will first challenge Lichtenstein; then one by one, I will challenge all those that wear peacock feathers on their helmets. This is my intention, by God! If the Lord Jesus but send me victory, then my vow will be fulfilled."

Zbishko smiled at the thought. His face was exactly like the face of the boy who vows to achieve heroic exploits when grown to be a man.

"Ah!" said Matzko, and shook his head. "If you should conquer at least three knights of distinguished families, then not only would your vow be fulfilled, but there would also be considerable booty."

"Three!" exclaimed Zbishko. "While yet in jail I vowed that I should stop at nothing to please Danusia. Not only three, but as many as there are fingers on my hands."

Matzko shrugged his shoulders.

"You may wonder, and doubt my word, but I will go from Malborg to Yurand at Spichow. I cannot miss paying my respects to the father of Danusia. With him I will strike out against the Germans of Chelm. You stated yourself that there is no greater terror to the Germans in all Mazovia."

"And if he refuse to let you take Danusia?"

"Why should he? He is seeking his revenge, and I mine. Who could suit him better than I? Finally, since the Princess consented to the betrothal, he will not oppose it."

"I fear," said Matzko, "that you will enlist all the men of Bogdanetz to form such a retinue as is becoming a knight, and the land will therefore go to waste. While I live you shall not depopulate Bogdanetz, but after my death, I know you will persuade the residents to accompany you."

"God will find me a retinue; besides, our relative, Yanko of Tultcha, will not be niggardly."

At that moment the door opened and, as though in proof that God was really thinking of a retinue for Zbishko, on the threshold appeared two powerful men, dark-skinned, in yellow caftans, resembling those worn by Jews, and abnormally wide trousers. As they entered they placed their fingers on their foreheads, their lips, their breast, at the same time making low bows.

"Who are these devils?" asked Matzko. "Who are you?"

"Your slaves," answered the newcomers in broken Polish.

"How so? Whence come you? Who sent you here?"

"We were sent here by Master Zavisha, as a gift to the young knight."

"Good God! Two more!" rejoiced Matzko. "What people do you belong to?"

"We are Turks."

"Turks?" Zbishko asked over again. "This is glorious! I shall have two Turks in my retinue! Have you ever seen Turks?"

He sprang toward them, poked them with his fingers and examined them as if they were monstrosities. And Matzko said:

"I have not seen, but I have heard that there are Turks serving the Master of Garbow. He took them prisoners from the Roman Caesar, Sigismund, while fighting on the Danube. Well, you vile anti-Christ?"

"Our master commanded us to be baptized," said one of the captives.

"Had you not the means to purchase your liberty?"

"We are from distant lands—from the shores of Asia—from Brusa."

Zbishko always listened with avidity to accounts of wars, especially when they related to exploits of the famous Zavisha of Garbow. And now he began to inquire of the Turks how they came to fall into slavery.

But there was nothing unusual in the narrative of the Turks. Three years ago Zavisha had fallen upon them in a defile, cut down some of them; some he took prisoners and presented them to his friends.

The hearts of the listeners fluttered with joy; at that time slaves were few, and they represented quite a fortune.

Shortly Zavisha himself appeared, accompanied by Pashka Zlodiey of Biscupetz. As they had all exerted themselves to secure the freedom of Zbishko, they now rejoiced in their success, and each brought some gift in remembrance of his happy deliverance. The liberal Master of Tatchew presented Zbishko with a gold-fringed caparison, and Pashko a Hungarian sword, valued at five pounds of silver. Then came Liss of Targoviska, Farurel and Kshon of Goats' Heads, with Marcine of Vrozimovitz; and, finally, Zyndarm of Mashkovitz—all bearing a variety of presents.

Zbishko greeted them with affection, doubly happy because of the gifts, and also of the good will shown him by the most famous knights of the kingdom. The knights inquired regard-

ing the time of the departure and the health of Matzko, recommending, as experienced men, all sorts of salves and medications, which they severally declared healed wounds like magic.

Matzko entrusted Zbishko to their care, as it was evident he was not long for this world. It is hard to live with an iron splinter between one's ribs. The old knight complained that he was expectorating blood and could not eat. A quart of shelled nuts, two palms full of sausage and a plate of omelet made up his daily portion. He had several blood-lettings at the hands of Father Tzypeck, thinking thereby to drive the fever from his heart and enable him to regain his appetite, but it was of no avail.

But he so rejoiced at the gifts bestowed on his nephew that at that moment he felt better; and when Amilei, in order to regale such worthy guests, ordered a barrel of wine to be brought, he also desired a goblet.

The conversation drifted to the deliverance of Zbishko and his betrothal to Danusia. The knights were confident that Yurand of Spichow would not antagonize the will of the Princess, especially if Zbishko should avenge the death of Danusia's mother, and bring the promised feathers.

"And as to Lichtenstein," said Zavisha, "I doubt if he will fight, for he is a monk, and one of the important dignitaries of the Order. Why, people of his retinue declare that he may in time become the Grand Master of the Order."

"If he declines the challenge, then he loses his honor," declared Liss of Targoviska.

"He is not a secular knight," answered Zavisha, "and monks are not allowed to fight duels."

"They often do fight, however."

"That is because the customs of the Order have become corrupt. The Crusaders make all sorts of vows, and, to the chagrin of the entire Christian world, they oftener break than observe them. But a Crusader is not obliged to enter into a life and death combat."

"Then one cannot meet them unless it is in war."

"It is the general belief that there will be no war," said Zbishko. "The Crusaders fear us now."

To which Zyndarm of Mashkovitz replied:

"Peace will be short-lived. There can be no conciliation with a wolf; he lives on plunder."

"Meanwhile we shall probably have a conflict with Timur the Lame," added Powala. "Prince Withold has suffered defeat at the hands of Ediga. That is certain."

"Quite certain. And Spitko, the chief, has not returned," repeated Pashko.

"And what a great number of Lithuanian princes fell on the battlefield!"

"The deceased queen predicted that very thing," said the Master of Tatchew.

"Well, perhaps we shall also have to move against Timur."

Here the conversation turned on the Lithuanian campaign against the Tartars. There was no further doubt that Withold, more ardent than experienced, had suffered a terrible defeat at Worskla; that a great many Lithuanian and Russian warriors had fallen, and with them some Polish volunteer knights, and even Crusaders.

The guests of Amilei particularly pitied the fate of young Spitka of Melshtin, the richest grandee in the kingdom, who had voluntarily enlisted in the campaign, and after the battle disappeared. Everybody praised to the skies his true knightly conduct; having received from a hostile chief a visor, he scorned to use it in battle, preferring death to favors from a heathen chief. However, it was not certain whether Spitko had perished or had been taken prisoner. If captured he could purchase his liberty, being enormously rich, and besides, King Vladislaus had enfeoffed him with the entire territory of Podolia.

But the defeat of the Lithuanians might have a terrible effect on the entire Jagellon kingdom, for there was no telling but the Tartars, flushed with the victory over Withold, might fall upon the lands and cities of the grand duchy. In such a contingency the whole kingdom would be drawn into the war.

A great number of knights—Zavisha, Farurei, Dobko, and even Powala—those that were in the habit of seeking adventures at foreign courts—now remained at Krakow, not knowing what the future had in store for them. If Tamerlane, the ruler of twenty-seven kingdoms, should set in motion his numberless forces, the danger would then assume immense proportions. There were people who believed that that danger was not to be avoided.

"If necessary we shall try conclusions with Tamerlane himself. He will not find it as easy to master our people as he mastered those he has met so far. And, finally, other Christian emperors will come to our aid."

Zyndarm of Mashkowitz, who bore a special hatred to the Order, said with bitterness:

"As to the emperors, I do not know; but the Crusaders are



ready to side with the Tartars and attack us on the other side."

The other knights began to debate. The Crusaders, declared one, "fear God no longer, and are only solicitous about their own well-being; but, of course, will not aid the heathen against a Christian people. It is the general belief that Timur is fighting somewhere in Asia, and the Tartar chief Ediga has lost so many men in battle that it seems he is himself depressed by his victory. Prince Withold is adroit, and has probably well fortified his cities, and even though the Lithuanians have this time suffered defeat, they are buoyed by the hope that they have conquered the Tartars before, and can do it again."

"It is not the Tartars but the Germans with whom we shall have a life and death struggle," declared Zyndarm, "and if we do not overpower them, they will be our ruin."

Then he turned to Zbishko.

"Mazovia will perish first of all. Fear not; you will always find plenty of work there!"

"May God grant it!" said Powala, raising his cup.

"Here is to the health of Zbishko and Danusia!"

"And to the destruction of the Germans!" added Zyndarm.

The knights were about to disperse, when a nobleman of the Princess' court entered, carrying a falchion in his hand, bowed, and, with a strange smile, turned to Zbishko.

"The Princess commanded me to tell you," he said, "that she will stay but one more night in Krakow and that she will depart to-morrow."

"Very well," said Zbishko. "But why so soon? Has some one been taken ill?"

"No; only she has a visitor from Mazovia."

"Has the Prince arrived?"

"Not the Prince, but Yurand of Spichow," answered the nobleman.

Zbishko was terribly agitated, and his heart began to beat as it did when the death sentence was read to him.

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## CHAPTER II.

Princess Anna was not much surprised at the arrival of Yurand of Spichow. It often happened that amid the constant skirmishes with the neighboring German knights he would suddenly be taken with a longing to see Danusia. He would then unexpectedly appear at Warsaw or Tzechanow, or where

the court of Prince Yanoush happened to be. At the sight of the child he was always stricken with grief, for Danusia, with the lapse of time, came to resemble her mother more and more, so that it seemed to Yurand that he saw the deceased as she looked when he first saw her at Princess Anna's in Warsaw. People thought that his grief would finally soften his steel heart, which only breathed vengeance.

The Princess had often tried to persuade him to abandon bloody Spichow and remain with the court by the side of Danusia. The Prince himself had tried to hold him with an offer of an important post. But it was all in vain. The sight of Danusia opened the old wounds in his heart. He lost all desire to sleep, to eat, or to talk. He was visibly agitated, and his blood seemed to boil. Yurand would finally disappear and return to the bogs of Spichow to drown in blood his wrath and grief. The people would then say: "Woe to the Germans! They do not resemble sheep, but to Yurand they are sheep, for he slaughters them like a wolf." And, in very truth, after the lapse of some time rumors would come of the seizure of foreign volunteers, who were traveling along the frontier to join the Crusaders; of the cities reduced to ashes, of bloody conflicts from which the terrible Yurand always came out victorious. With the bloodthirsty disposition of the Mazovii and the German knights, who, in the name of the Order, held the lands and cities adjacent to Mazovia, even when perfect peace reigned between the Mazovian princes and the Order, the din of battle never ceased on the frontier. The dwellers on the frontier would not venture on wood-cutting or harvesting without arming themselves with bows and lances. People lived without knowing what the morrow would bring forth, always ready for war, their hearts always hardened. They were not content with merely defending themselves, but exacted pillage for pillage, repaid incendiarism with incendiarism, attack with attack.

It happened that when the Germans were stealing through the narrow vistas of the forest, bent on seizing the peasants or the flocks, the Mazovii were at the same time doing the same thing. They often come upon one another, and then they would fight until the last man fell. Frequently the chiefs only would challenge one another to single combat, and the victor would carry away all the men of the vanquished. When complaints against Yurand reached the court at Warsaw, the Prince met them with complaints about the attacks made by the German knights at other places.

Thus, while both sides were seeking justice—and neither

wished nor could carry it out—all the pillaging, incendiarism and attacks went unpunished.

But Yurand, living in his boggy, reed-covered Spichow, and burning with an unquenchable thirst for revenge, became so unbearable to his foreign neighbors that their fear became greater than his fierceness. The lands bordering on Spichow remained uncultivated, the woods were overgrown with wild hop and hazel; the meadows with weeds. Few German knights bred upon the farms in their own country, ventured to settle in the neighborhood of Spichow; and whoever did venture, soon found it best to abandon his fief, flocks and peasants. The knights frequently made concerted attacks on Spichow with invariably disastrous results. They resorted to all sorts of artifices. They once brought from Manie a knight, renowned for his prowess and ferocity, to meet Yurand in combat on smooth ground; but as soon as the antagonists took their places, the German, at the sight of the Mazovii, stood like one in speechless amaze, lost his courage, and presently saved himself by flight. Yurand struck with his lance at the exposed shoulder of the fleeing knight, and thus branded him as a coward.

Since that time his neighbors were so alarmed that every German, on beholding smoke emanating from the chimneys of Spichow, made the sign of the cross and prayed to his patron saint—so strong was the belief that Yurand, for the sake of revenge, had sold his soul to the Evil Spirit.

Terrible tales were told of Spichow. It was said that there was a narrow path across the swamps in the thick of the sleeping, foul sloughs, which was not wide enough for two horsemen; that along this path were strewn the bones of Germans, and the heads of drowned people flitted about on spiders' legs, moaning, howling and luring people with their horses into the depths. It was said that the fences of the town itself were adorned with human skulls. The truth lay only in the fact that in the pits under the Prince's house in Spichow, there were always several dozen moaning prisoners, and that the name of Yurand inspired more terror than all the hallucinations about skeletons and drowned people.

Zbishko, on learning of Yurand's arrival, immediately hastened to him, but not without some alarm in his heart. That he had chosen Danusia as the lady of his heart, and made vows to her, no one could have prevented, but later the Princess had betrothed him to her. What would Yurand say to that? Would he consent to it? And what if he, availing himself of his parental power, should refuse to permit it? These

questions filled Zbishko's soul with misgivings, for Danusia was dearer to him than the entire world. He found hope in the only thought that Yurand, so far from reproaching, would only praise his attack on Lichtenstein, since it was done in an effort to avenge Danusia's mother, for which he came near losing his life.

He began questioning the nobleman who came from the Princess.

"Whither are you going to take me? To the castle?"

"Direct to the castle. Yurand and his retinue are there on the invitation of the Princess."

"Tell me, what sort of man is he? I must know how to speak to him."

"What can I tell you! That man is entirely unlike other men. They say he was gay once—before the blood congealed in his breast."

"Is he wise?"

"Both wise and shrewd. He strikes others and keeps out of their reach. He has but one eye; the other was destroyed by a German arrow, but with that one eye he can see through people. He cannot be forced to do anybody's bidding, nor can he be led by persuasion. The Princess is the only person he loves, because he married one of her attendants, and now his child is being brought up in our court."

Zbishko gave a sigh of relief.

"You say, then, that he does not antagonize the will of the Princess?"

"I know what you desire to learn, and will tell you what I heard. The Princess told him of your betrothal, but I have not been informed of his answer."

They were approaching the castle gate. The same captain of the king's archers, who but lately led Zbishko to the scaffold, now bowed to him. Passing the guard, Zbishko and his escort found themselves in the courtyard, and turning to the right, they walked toward that wing of the castle occupied by the mistress.

The nobleman met a servant and asked:

"Where is Yurand of Spichow?"

"In the Curved Room, with his daughter."

"This way," said the nobleman, pointing to a door. Zbishko made the sign of the cross, drew apart the curtain and, with beating heart, entered. But some moments elapsed ere he saw Yurand and Danusia, for the room was not only "curved," but also dark. Presently he discerned the flaxen hair of the girl,

who was sitting in her father's lap. Seeing that his presence was not noticed, Zbishko stopped, coughed, and then said:

"Blessed be the name of God!"

"Forever and forever," said Yurand, rising.

At that moment Danusia sprang toward the young knight, and, grasping his hand, cried:

"Zbishko! Papa has arrived!"

Zbishko kissed Danusia's hand, then, approaching Yurand, said:

"I came to greet you. Do you know who I am?"

He stooped a little, as though he wished to touch Yurand's feet, but Yurand grasped his arm, turned him toward the light, and silently began to examine him.

Zbishko had already regained his equanimity, and, raising his inquisitive eyes to Yurand, he saw a man of colossal proportions, with flaxen hair and mustache, pock-marked face and one eye of steel color. It seemed to Zbishko that that eye was boring through him. His agitation was again taking possession of him, and, not knowing what to say or how to break the oppressive silence, he asked:

"So you are Yurand of Spichow, the father of Danusia?"

But Yurand pointed to an oaken bench, upon which Zbishko seated himself, without answering the young man's question. Yurand silently continued his examination.

Zbishko finally lost his patience, and said:

"I do not enjoy sitting here like a prisoner under examination."

Then only did Yurand break his silence.

"You are eager to fight Lichtenstein?" he asked.

"Well, yes."

A strange fire shone in the eye of the Lord of Spichow, and his terrible face brightened a little. He glanced in the direction of Danusia, and asked:

"For her?"

"For whom else? My uncle must have told you of my vow to pluck peacock feathers from German heads. There will be not three, but as many as I have fingers on both hands. Besides, I am determined to aid you in avenging Danusia's mother."

"Woe to them!" answered Yurand.

And again silence reigned. Zbishko considered that in showing his hatred for the Germans he appealed to Yurand's heart, so he said:

"I shall give the Germans no rest, although I have nearly forfeited my head."

Here he turned to Danusia and added:

"She saved me."

"I know," said Yurand.

"You are not angry with me for it?"

"If you have made a vow, then proceed to fulfill it. That is the knightly custom."

Zbishko hesitated a little, then spoke with apparent alarm.

"As you are perhaps aware, she placed upon my brow a headband. The whole knighthood saw it, and the Franciscan, who stood beside me with a crucifix in his hand, heard her say: 'He is mine!' And, verily, while life endures, I shall not belong to any one else. God is my witness!"

He kneeled, and in order to show that he was familiar with knightly custom, with great respect he kissed the shoes of Danusia, who was sitting on the arm of a chair. Then he arose, and, turning to Yurand, asked:

"Did you ever see her equal?"

"Yes, I have seen one, but the Germans killed her."

"Then, listen," Zbishko began, loudly. "We both have one injury, and we shall have one revenge. All our people were killed by the cursed German archers. You will find no better man than I for your work. It is not new to me. Ask my uncle. Lance or battle-axe, long or short sword, they are all one to me. And did uncle tell you about the Frisians?—I will slaughter your Germans like sheep. And as for Danusia, I swear to you, on my knees, that for her I would fight the very ruler of hell, and shall yield her neither for riches, lands, flocks or for any other thing. If I were given a castle with glass windows, I would relinquish the castle and follow her even to the end of the world."

Yurand was sitting, his head resting in his hands, but he finally straightened up, and said, with pity and grief:

"I admire you, boy, but Danusia you shall not have. She is not for you, poor fellow."

Zbishko was disconcerted, and looked at Yurand with wide open eyes. But Danusia came to his aid. Zbishko was dear to her; she wished to be known as a "mature maiden," and was averse to being treated as a mere girl possessed only of childish whims. Her betrothal caused her infinite delight and she appreciated the sweetmeats which her knight brought her daily; and now she understood that all these things were to be taken from her, she swiftly glided from the arm of the chair and, hiding her face on her father's knees, cried:

"Papa, papa, I shall cry!"

Yurand apparently loved her above everything else in the

world. He caressingly placed his hand on her head. There was no fury or anger in his face, only sadness.

Zbishko, meanwhile, had recovered his composure, and said:

"How, now? Would you oppose the will of God?"

To which Yurand answered:

"If it be the will of God, then you shall have her, but I cannot bend my will in your favor. I should be glad, but it is impossible."

Taking Danusia by the hand he led her toward the door, and when Zbishko attempted to oppose his departure, he stopped for a moment and said:

"I do not forbid you fulfilling your knightly obligations, but do not ask me any more questions, for I can tell you nothing more."

These were the depressing words which rung in Zbishko's ears as Yurand, leading his daughter, strode from the room.

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### CHAPTER III.

The following day Yurand did not in the least avoid Zbishko, nor did he prevent Zbishko's showing all sorts of attentions to Danusia on the way, such as was customary for a knight to show to his lady. On the contrary, Zbishko, though greatly grieved, noticed that the surly lord of Spichow rather favored and almost pitied him on account of the dreadful answer he felt obliged to give him.

The young knight frequently attempted to approach him and engage him in conversation, which presented no difficulties on the road, because both were on horseback, escorting the Princess. Yurand, ordinarily taciturn, now talked willingly, but no sooner did Zbishko broach the question relating to the mysterious obstacles in the way of his union with Danusia than the conversation suddenly ceased, the face of Yurand again became gloomy, and he threw restless glances at Zbishko, as if fearing to betray himself.

Zbishko thought that the Princess might be able to enlighten him; therefore, seizing an opportune moment, he sought to get the information from her, but the Princess herself knew very little regarding Yurand's opposition.

"Some secret," she said. "Yurand himself told me that, but at the same time begged me not to question him, because not only did he not wish to but he could not now explain. It is likely that he is bound by some oath, as is not infrequent in

such cases. But with the help of God things will right themselves."

"Without Danusia I am like a chained dog, or a bear in a pit," answered Zbishko. "There is no joy, no consolation—nothing but sighs and grief. It were better for me to go with Withold to Tawan, and be killed by the Tartars. But first I must bring uncle to his destination, and then pluck from German heads the promised plumes. I may be killed in the attempt, but better that than to see Danusia the bride of some one else."

The Princess raised her kind, blue eyes, and with a shade of wonder in her voice asked:

"And would you consent to it?"

"I? Not while there is a drop of blood in my veins. Unless, indeed, my hand were withered and could not hold an axe."

"Then you must endeavor to overcome all opposition."

"Yes; but how can I take her against her father's will?"

To which the Princess answered, as if soliloquizing:

"Great God! Does it not happen?"

Then she turned to Zbishko.

"Is not God's will greater than a father's? What did Yurand say? 'If,' he said, 'it be the will of God, then you shall have her.'"

"He told me the same thing!" exclaimed Zbishko. "'If,' he said, 'it be the will of God, then you shall have her.'"

"There is hope for you in that remark."

"My only hope is in your good-will, gracious lady."

"My good-will is yours, and I am certain Danusia will remain faithful to you. It was but yesterday I asked her: 'Danusia, will you be faithful to Zbishko?' and she answered: 'I will be his or nobody's.' She is an unripe child, but is as true as steel. She belongs to the nobility, and is no commoner. She possesses all the spirit and determination of her mother."

"There is some encouragement in that."

"But remember that you must be constant. You men are often anything but constant. You swear to love faithfully, and immediately turn to another. You cannot be held with a rope. I am speaking the truth! Some neigh like an unbridled steed at the sight of every maiden."

"If I prove faithless, may the Lord Jesus chastise me!" energetically exclaimed Zbishko.

"Well, then, bear it in mind. As soon as you have seen the Prince safely home, return to us. If occasion presents itself, you will win your spurs, and then we will see what God will



send us. Danusia, meantime, will grow up and will comprehend her own duty better. True, she is very much in love with you now, I must admit, but not yet as grown people love. Perhaps Yurand himself will favor you then. It seems to me that he would only be too glad, if there were not some obstacle. You will go to Spichow and engage the Germans with him. Perchance you will do him some service which will endear you to him."

"I myself intended to do it, but with your encouragement, gracious Princess, it will be so much easier."

This conversation greatly cheered Zbishko. But it happened that at the first halting-place Matzko became so ill that it was necessary to remain there long enough to permit him to gather strength for the remainder of the journey. The good Princess left him a store of medicines, but had to proceed on her journey, and the owners of Bogdanetz were obliged to part with the Mazovian court. Zbishko fell at the feet first of the Princess, then of Danusia; again repeated his vow of faithful knightly service, promised to come soon to Warsaw or Tzechanow, and, finally, caught her in his strong arms and said in an agitated voice:

"Think of me, my darling flower; O, think of me, my golden dove!"

Danusia embraced him as a child embraces her older brother, pressed her lips against his cheek and burst into tears.

"I will not go to Tzechanow without Zbishko!" she repeated; "I will not!"

Yurand saw it, but did not get into a passion. On the contrary, he courteously bade the young man good-by, and, when seated on his horse, again turned to him and said:

"God be with you! Harbor no animosity toward me."

"How could I harbor animosity toward the father of Danusia!" ingenuously answered Zbishko, as he inclined his head to the stirrup. Yurand warmly pressed his hand, and said:

"May God help you in everything—you understand?" And he rode away.

Zbishko understood the significance of these words and, returning to the wagon containing Matzko, said:

"Do you know? He is not against Danusia's alliance with me, but there is some obstacle. You were at Spichow—your mind is bright—try to think what that obstacle may be."

But Matzko was seriously ill. The fever which took hold of him in the morning, towards evening had so progressed that

he lost consciousness, and instead of answering Zbishko, he looked at him with astonished eyes, and asked:

"Where are the bells ringing?"

Zbishko was alarmed; it occurred to him that when a sick man hears the ringing of bells, his end must be near. He also thought that if the old man should die without a priest, without confession, he might be consigned to hell, or, at least, for long years to purgatory. It was necessary to take him as soon as possible to a halting place, where Matzko could have holy communion administered to him.

With that end in view he determined to drive all night. He seated himself on the wagon in which the old man lay and watched over him till morning. From time to time he carefully administered to the invalid some of the wine given to them by the merchant Amilei. Exhausted from the heat, Matzko drank the wine greedily. It gave him apparent relief. After he had emptied the second quart, he even came to himself again, and after the third, he fell into such sound sleep that Zbishko occasionally leaned over to make sure that he was not dead.

Zbishko was stricken with profound grief at the very thought of the possibility of the old man's death. Up to the time of his incarceration in the Krakow dungeon he had not realized how he loved his uncle, who was both father and mother to him. But now he thoroughly realized and felt that after the death of Matzko his loneliness would be dreadful—without kin (if we do not count that abbot who held the lien on Bogdanetz)—without friends, and without help. At the same time he thought that if Matzko died, it would be due to the Germans, on account of whom he had nearly lost his head, all his ancestors had perished, as well as the mother of Danusia, and many other innocent people. While these thoughts ran through Zbishko's brain, astonishment took possession of him. "Is there not a man," he said to himself, "in the entire kingdom who has not seen injustice done by those blood-thirsty Germans, and who does not thirst for vengeance?" He recalled the Germans with whom he had fought at Wilno, and thought that the Tartars fought with no greater ferocity, and that there was no people in the world more despicable.

The break of day interrupted the thoughts of Zbishko. The morning was bright, but cold. Matzko had apparently improved, for his breathing was more regular and peaceful. The sun was already warming the earth when he awoke, opened his eyes, and said:

"I feel better. Where are we?"

"We are approaching Olkush. You know, where silver is mined and taken to the province."

"If we could get some of it! We could then build Bogdanetz!"

"You probably feel better," said Zbishko, laughing. "Yes, and we could even build a stone castle. But let us get to the halting place; we shall find refuge there, and you will receive extreme unction. Everything is in the hands of God, but it is best to have one's conscience in order."

"I am a sinful man, and I gladly repent," said Matzko. "I dreamt last night that imps were pulling off my clothing—and they jabbered in German. By the grace of God, I have improved. Have you slept, lad?"

"How could I sleep when I was watching over you?"

"Then lie down for a little while. I will awake you when we start."

"How could I sleep?"

"What prevents you?"

With his childish eyes Zbishko looked at his uncle.

"What, if not love? I have sighed until I have a pain in my stomach. But I will mount the horse and then I will feel better."

He stepped from the wagon and mounted a horse, which was brought by the Turk presented to him by Zavisha. Matzko from time to time pressed his hand to his side, but was apparently not thinking of his illness, for he shook his head, smacked his lips, and finally said:

"I am wondering whom in the world do you resemble, you are so greedy for love. Neither your father nor I was like you."

Zbishko, instead of answering, straightened himself in his saddle, put his arms akimbo, threw back his head, and then cried with all his might:

"For thee I weep both day and night,  
And seek thee with sorrow and pain;  
And though the tear in mine eye is bright,  
I shall never see thee again."

Oh!

He uttered a dismal and prolonged "Oh!" at the close of these lines, and the "oh!" spread through the woods, rolled in a broad echo and died away in the underbrush.

Matzko again rubbed his side, in which the splinter of the German spear-head lay, and said, sighing:

"Formerly people were wiser—you understand?"

He began to muse, as if recalling the past, and added:

"Although there were fools then also."

They had reached the end of the forest. The huts of miners appeared, and further, the jagged walls of Olkush, built by King Kasimir, and the steeple of the church, erected by Viadilas Loketek.

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## CHAPTER IV.

The canon of the parish church administered the last rites to Matzko and cordially detained him, with Zbishko, over night. They left on the following morning and turned toward Silesia, along the border of which they had to make their way to Great Poland. The road lay mainly along forests, in which at sundown were heard, like the rumbling of an earthquake, the roaring of bisons and wild bulls, and at night, through the overgrown hazel, the eyes of wolves sparkled. The greatest danger, however, that threatened travelers and merchants on that road was from the German and Germanized Silesian knights, whose castles dotted the eminences on the very frontier. True, as a result of the war between King Vladislav and the Prince of Opol, who had been aided by his Silesian nephews, most of these castles had been destroyed by Polish hands, yet it was necessary to take all precautions, and especially after nightfall it was unsafe to travel without weapons in hand, ready for instant use.

Our knights, however, had an uneventful journey, and the traveling became tedious. There was another day's ride to Bogdanetz. Suddenly, at night, there were heard the tramping of hoofs and the snorting of horses.

"There are some people coming up behind us," said Zbishko.

Matzko, who was awake, looked at the stars, and said, in the tone of an experienced man:

"It is almost day. Highwaymen do not attack at the break of day; by morning they must be home."

Zbishko, however, drew in the reins, turned the horses so as to block the road, alighted from the wagon, and waited.

In a few minutes several horsemen could be seen in the dark. One of them rode in the van of the detachment, a few feet ahead of the others, but apparently had no intention of hiding, for he was singing at the top of his voice. Zbishko could not hear the words, but a merry "Hop! Hop!" with which the stranger ended every couplet of his song, reached his ears.

"Friends!" said Zbishko to himself, but shouted: "Stand still!"

"And you sit down!" answered a jesting voice.

"Why do you follow us?"

"And why do you block the road?"

"Answer; our bows are drawn!"

"And ours are stringless—fire away!"

"Answer like a man, or woe to you."

Instead of an answer came a merry song.

Quarreling one fine morrow,  
Sorrow met sorrow.

Hop! Hop! Hop!

And having quarreled to their hearts' content,  
In song, in dance, the day they spent.

Hop! Hop! Hop!"

Zbishko was surprised at the answer. Meantime the singing ceased, and the same voice asked:

"And how does old Matzko fare? Alive yet?"

Matzko raised himself in the wagon and said:

"My God! Why, these are our people!"

Zbishko came forward on his horse.

"Who is inquiring for Matzko?"

"A neighbor, Zych of Zgojhelitzi. I have been looking for you the whole week, and inquiring of people on the road."

"Uncle! Uncle! It is Zych of Zgojhelitzi!" exclaimed Zbishko.

He was very happy. Zych was indeed their neighbor, and was, besides, a very kind man, beloved by everybody for his cheerful temper.

"Well, how are you?" asked Zych, shaking Matzko's hand.

"Not well, not well," answered Matzko. "But I am glad to see you. Merciful God! I feel as if I were in Bogdanetz."

"What ails you? I heard that you were wounded by a German arrow."

"Yes. The canine brood! The splinter of an arrow is still between my ribs."

"Good God! Well, what did you do? Have you tried bear's fat?"

"You see," said Zbishko, "everybody advises bear's fat. If we only reach Bogdanetz! I shall go immediately to the bee-hive with an axe."

"Yagenka may have some; if not, I will procure it of someone else."

"Which Yagenka? Your wife was called Malgochna," said Matzko.

"O, Malgochna! It will be three years next Michaelmas since she was buried. A hard woman she was—God rest her soul in the realm of the blessed! Yagenka takes after her, only she is young yet."

"The billows are breaking over the rock,  
The maiden's a chip of the block.  
Hop! Hop!"

"I said to Malgochna: 'Do not climb the pine tree; you are fifty years old.' But, no; she climbed it. A twig broke under her and down she came! I tell you, she made a hole in the ground, and three days afterwards she breathed her last."

"Eternal bliss be hers!" said Matzko. "Yes, I remember how she would put her arms akimbo and behave so queerly that the peasants hid themselves in the hay. But there was no better housewife. So she fell from a pine-tree! How strange!"

"Yes, she fell like a fir-apple in winter. Ah, what sorrow we had! Do you know that after the interment, to drown my sorrow, I drank so much that for three days they could not wake me up. They thought that I, too, had gone the way of all flesh. The tears that I have shed could be gathered in pailfuls. But Yagenka manages the household well enough. Everything is on her shoulders now."

"I hardly remember her. When I left she was no taller than an upright axe; she could pass under my horse without touching his belly with her head. But that was long ago. She must have grown up."

"On Saint Agnes' day she was fifteen, but I have not seen her for almost a year."

"Where have you been? Whence are you returning?"

"From the war. Only Yagenka is home—what is there to keep me there?"

Matzko, although ill, at the mention of war, pricked up his ears, and asked:

"Have you been with Prince Withold at Worskea?"

"Yes, yes!" joyfully answered Zych of Zgojhiltzi. "But God was not with us—we have suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of Ediga. First of all, our horses were killed under us. The Tartars never meet one face to face, but shoot from a distance. If you press them, they run, then turn and shoot again."

You can do nothing with them. You see, the knights of our regiment boasted vehemently:

"We will not lower our spears," they said; "we will not unsheath our swords, but will charge them on our horses and send them flying in all directions, the reptiles."

They bragged, and bragged; but when the arrows began to whistle we could not see the light of day, and the result was that, after the battle, not one out of every ten survived. You may believe me or not, more than half of our army, seventy Lithuanian and Russian Princes fell on the battlefield; and as for volunteers and all sorts of noblemen, you could not count them in two weeks."

"I know," interrupted Matzko. "Quite a number of our volunteers also fell."

"Even nine Crusaders they, too, had to join Withold's forces. A great many of our people fell, too, for, as you know, where others look behind, ours go forward. The Prince relied more on our knights, and during the battle, he would have none but Poles for his suite. And, my God! what a sight it was! All around him they fell like grass under the sickle, but he did not mind it. Spyhko of Melsiryn perished, as did also Bernard the Armorer, and Nicholas the Cup-Bearer and Prokop and Pshetzav and Dobrogost and Tasko of Lasewitz, and Pimek Masur and Yasko of Dombrow, and—but who can count them all! Some were so thickly studded with arrows that they resembled porcupines—so laughable to look at!" And he really burst into laughter, as if he were relating a gay anecdote.

"What then?" asked Zbishko.

"Then the Prince fled, but immediately took courage again, as is always the case with him. The more you bend him, the more he will straighten like a hazel shrub. We then hastened to the Tawan ford to guard the crossing. We were joined by a handful of fresh knights from Poland. On the following day Ediga came with a cloud of Tartars, but could do nothing. There was merriment, I tell you! As he attempted to cross the ford, we fell upon him, and slaughtered a great many of his men, and carried away a large number. I caught five of them myself, and I am bringing them to Zgojhelitzi. At daylight we will see their snouts."

"There was a rumor in Krakow that the war might extend into the kingdom."

"Ediga is no fool. He saw the kind of knights we have, and the most famous ones remained at home because the queen was against Withold undertaking a war at his own risk. Old

Eliga is shrewd. He saw at Tawan that the Prince's forces were being augmented, so he betook himself to more distant climes."

"And you return home?"

"Yes. I have nothing further to do there. At Krakow I learned that you had left a little before me."

"That is how you came to know that we were here?"

"I knew it was you, because I inquired at every stopping-place."

Here he turned to Zbishko.

"Great heavens! I saw you when you were little, but now, though it is dark, I can see that you are like a bull. So you were ready to shoot at me? It is plain you must have been in the war."

"From childhood I was bred in war. Let uncle say if I am accustomed to war or not."

"There is no necessity. The master of Tatchew told me at Krakow all about you. So Yurand would not give you his daughter. I should not be so obstinate, for I like you. You will forget her when you see my Yagenka. She is like a ripe apple."

"No, I shall not forget her, even if I saw ten such as your Yagenka."

"Her portion will be Mochildoli, where the wind-mill stands. When I left the place there were ten good fillies and a number of foals. Plenty of people will beg me for her—you will see!"

Zbishko was about to answer, "Not I!" when Zych of Zgojhelitzi again started a tune:

"Trembling, at your feet we knelt in awe.  
Each eager to be named your son-in-law."

"There is nothing but song and movement in your head," Matzko observed.

"What do blessed souls in heaven occupy themselves with?"

"They sing."

"And the condemned ones weep. I prefer to go to the singing ones rather than to the weeping ones. Saint Peter would say: 'He must be sent to heaven, for the rogue would sing even in hell, and that would not do!' Look!—day is dawning!"

Some minutes later the horsemen rode into a glade, where, on a small lake, some people were fishing. At the sight of armed knights they dropped their net, sprang out of the water, seized their hooks and harpoons and assumed a fighting attitude.



"We are taken for highwaymen," laughed Zych. "Hulloa, fishermen! To whom do you belong?"

The fishermen stood silent, distrustfully looking at the knights. Finally the oldest of them, recognizing acquaintances, answered:

"To the Abbot of Toultscha."

"Our relative," said Matzko, "who holds Bogdanetz in pledge. These are probably his forests, but he must have bought them lately."

"He has not bought them," answered Zych. "He fought for their possession with Wilko of Bjhozovia, and must have vanquished him. Last year they met in single combat on horseback and with long swords. The entire district was the stake; but I do not know the result, because I had left the neighborhood."

"He is our relative," said Matzko. "He will not fight us, and may let us have some of the pledged land."

"He may. If you have a frank talk with him, he will even add some of his own. That abbot is the same old knight; he knows how to wear a helmet. Besides, he is a pious man, and holds divine service in a truly remarkable way. But, of course, you remember his peculiarity. When he roars out at mass the swallows, nesting on the ceiling of the church, fly away in alarm. Of course, this makes the glory of God even greater."

"How can I help remembering! With his breathing he often puts out the candles at a distance of ten feet. Did he come to see Bogdanetz even once?"

"Of course he came. He settled five new peasants, with their wives, on cleared ground. He also visited Zgojhelitzl. As you know, he baptized Yagenka, and loves her very much, calling her his daughter."

"If he would only leave me the peasants!" said Matzko.

"What are five peasants to such a rich man! Finally, if Yagenka should ask him, he will leave you the peasants, without a question."

The conversation ceased for a few minutes. The sun rose above the dark forest. The knights made the sign of the cross and began their morning prayer.

Zych was the first to finish, and, striking his breast several times, said to his neighbors:

"Now I can see you better. How changed both of you are! You, Matzko, must mend considerably. Yagenka will look after you, for there are no women in your house. Well, well! one can see that there must be the splinter of a spear between your ribs. That is bad."

Then he turned to Zbishko.

"Let me look at you in the sunlight. Good God! I remember when you would lay hold of the tail of a colt and attempt to climb up his back; but now—the deuce!—you are a real knight! Your face is like your father's—but what a strapping fellow! A fellow like you should not fear to fight a bear."

"Talk about a bear!" answered Matzko. "He was much younger when Friz called him beardless, and he—which did not please Friz at all—pulled out his moustache."

"I know," interrupted Zych. "Then you fought them, and carried away all their belongings. All that has been told to me by the master of Tatchew—

"Gaily the German rushed into the fray,  
And died a pauper at the close of the day.

Hop! Hop!"

He looked at Zbishko with loving eyes. Zbishko, on his part, looked at the Zych's long figure with quiet curiosity, the thin face, with an abnormally large nose, and round laughing eyes.

"Oh!" said he, "with such a neighbor, if my uncle recover, we shall not be lonesome."

"It is better to have a jovial neighbor, with whom it is hard to quarrel," said Zych. "And you listen to what I will tell you, honestly and as a Christian. You will find no order in your household, and a sick man needs comfort. So I invite you to come with me to Zgojhelitzi. You will stay with us a month or two; it will be pleasant to me, and will do you good. Meantime, Yagenka will restore things to order in Bogdanetz. You may rely on her, and banish all worry from your mind. Zbishko will look after the household, while I will bring the abbot to Zgojhelitzi, and you can settle your accounts with him. My girl will look after you, Matzko, like a father, and a woman can attend the sick better than a man. Well, my dear ones, will you do as I ask you?"

"It is well known that you are a generous man, and always have been kind to people," answered Matzko; "but if I must die on account of that cursed splinter of iron which is imbedded between my ribs, then I prefer to die in my own hut. Besides, although sick, I can be of some use at home. If God should order me from this world—that cannot be helped, and attention will not avail. War has made us indifferent to comforts. I thank you heartily, however, for your kindness, and if

I do not requite your hospitality, with the aid of God, Zbishko will."

Zych of Zgolhelitzi, who was renowned for his kindness and hospitality, again insisted and begged, but Matzko was obstinate; if he must die, then he wished to die in his own house! During several years he pined for Bogdanetz, and now that God permitted him to get so near it, he would go to no other place.

With his hand he wiped the tears from his eyes, and, glancing all around him, said:

"If these are Wilko's forests, then we will reach Bogdanetz, by noon."

"Not Wilko's, but the abbot's," corrected Zbishko.

Matzko smiled, then said:

"If they are the abbot's, then they may be ours some day."

"You have just been speaking of death," jestingly exclaimed Zych, "and now you wish to outlive the abbot."

"I will not outlive him, but Zbishko will."

Their conversation was interrupted by the blowing of a horn that resounded in the forest. Zych immediately stopped his horse and began to listen.

"There is some one hunting, it seems," he said; "let us wait."

"Perhaps the abbot. It would be very pleasant to meet him here and now."

"Silence!" said Zych, and turned to his people. "Halt!"

They all halted. The sound of the horn was heard to come nearer, and a minute later the howling of dogs was heard.

"Halt!" said Zych. "They are approaching us."

Zbishko sprang from his horse and shouted:

"Give me a bow! There may be a wild beast coming in our direction! Quick! Quick!"

And snatching the bow from the hands of a Tartar, he kneeled, pressed the bow against the ground, strained his back until it looked like another bow, and in the twinkling of an eye strung his bow, put on the arrow, and ran into the forest.

"He strung the bow without a cord!" whispered Zych, surprised at the exhibition of such strength.

"Yes, he is a strong fellow," Matzko also whispered, with pride.

Meanwhile the sounds of the horn and the howling of the dogs came nearer and nearer, and suddenly there was heard a brisk trampling of hoofs, the crackling of twigs, and an old bearded bison came rushing into the road, with head inclined, blood-shot eyes, and his tongue thrust out, exhausted, terrible. Reaching the ditch on the road side, he leaped across it, fell on his forelegs, but raised himself, and was about to disappear in

the undergrowth on the other side of the road, when suddenly the ominous twang of a bowstring was heard and an arrow whistled by. The beast reared, turned around, emitted a terrible roar, and, as if lightning-struck, fell on the ground.

Zbishko appeared from behind a tree, again bent him bow, and approached, ready to send another arrow into the prostrate beast, but the latter only convulsively moved his legs.

Zbishko looked at him for a moment, then quietly turned to his people and shouted:

"He is dead!"

"Well, well!" said Zych, approaching, "with a single arrow!"

"It was near, and at a short distance it hits hard. Look! not only the head, but the entire arrow is buried under the shoulder-blade."

"The hunters must be near. They will surely claim him."

"They must reckon with me," answered Zbishko. "He was killed on the public road, which belongs to no one."

"And what if the abbot is hunting?"

"O, if it is the abbot, then he may have him!"

A few dozen dogs dashed from the woods. Espying the beast, they sprang at him with terrible howls, and were soon rolling all in a heap.

"The hunters will be here soon," said Zych. "Look! There they are, but they do not see the beast yet. Ho! Ho! This way! This way!"

Suddenly he became silent, shaded his eyes with his hand, and in a moment exclaimed:

"Good God! What do I see! Am I blind, or does it only seem to me?"

"I can see one on a dark horse in the lead," said Zbishko.

"Lord Jesus! Why, it is Yagenka!"

He ran forward, but before he could put his horse into a gallop there presented itself before the eyes of Zbishko a most curious spectacle. A girl, mounted on a fiery steed, man-fashion, with bow in hand and spear hanging on her back, was galloping toward them. Her hair, studded with hop-cones, hung loosely over her shoulders; her face was as bright as the dawn; an unbuttoned shirt covered her breast, and on the shirt she wore a woolen jacket, with the wool outside. When within hailing distance she drew the reins. In her face was depicted wonder and gladness. Finally, in a voice in which rang childish notes, she cried out in surprise:

"Papa! Dear papa!"

In the twinkling of an eye she dismounted, and when Zych came down from his horse she threw herself on his neck. For

a long while Zbishko heard only the sound of kisses and exclamations.

After a minute or so Yagenka began to question.

"Are you returning from the war? Are you well?"

"Why should I be ill! And how are you, and the little children? They must be well, or you would not be flying through the woods. But what are you doing here, girl?"

"You see—I am hunting," she answered, laughing.

"In other people's forests?"

"The abbot gave me permission. He also sent his own hunters and dogs with me."

Here she turned to her servants.

"Drive off the dogs, or they will destroy the hide. Ah, how glad I am to see you! All is well with us."

"And how happy I am!" said Zych. "Now let me kiss you again."

And again they kissed; then Yagenka said:

"How far the beast has led us away from home. It is about two miles, and the horses were beginning to tire. And what a powerful bison; have you seen him? He carries three of my arrows in his body. The last one must have killed him."

"He died from the last one, but not yours. That knight yonder killed him."

With her hand Yagenka brushed back the hair which hung over her eyes and looked attentively, but not very favorably, at Zbishko.

"Do you know him?" asked Zych.

"No, I do not."

"No wonder; he is so tall now. And do you recognize the old Matzko of Bogdanetz?"

"My God! So it is Matzko of Bogdanetz!" she exclaimed, and approaching the wagon, she kissed Matzko's hand. "Is it you?"

"It is I. Only, you see, I was wounded by the Germans."

"What Germans? The war was with the Tartars. I know it, because I asked papa to take me with him."

"Yes, but we did not engage in that war, but went to fight in Lithuania—myself and Zbishko."

"And where is Zbishko?"

"So you did not recognize Zbishko?" Matzko asked, laughing.

"Zbishko?" repeated the girl, and again looked at the young knight.

"That is he."

"As an old acquaintance, let me kiss you," gayly said Zbishko.

Yagenka quickly turned to Zbishko, but suddenly drew back, and covering her eyes with her hands said:

"I am abashed——"

"But we have known each other from childhood," urged Zbishko.

"Ah! now I remember you. Some eight years ago you and Matzko visited us, and your deceased mother brought us nuts with honey. When the old people had left, you gave me a filip on the nose, and ate all the nuts yourself."

"He would not do such a thing now," said Matzko. "He has been with Prince Withold and at the court of Krakow, and is familiar with courtly manners."

But Yagenka was preoccupied with something else, for she asked Zbishko:

"Did you kill the bison?"

"Yes."

"Let us see where the arrow is lodged."

"You cannot see it, for it is all under the shoulder-blade."

"Do not question him," said Zych. "Everybody saw him hit the beast; not only that, but we saw him bend the bow without a cord."

Yagenka for the third time looked at Zbishko, but this time with wonder.

"You bent the bow without a cord?" Zbishko detected a shade of distrust in her voice. He pressed the bow against the ground, bent it, and, wishing to display his courtly manners, he bent one knee and handed the bow to Yagenka.

The girl, instead of taking the bow, suddenly grew red in the face, without herself knowing why, and began to arrange her unbuttoned jacket.

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## CHAPTER V.

On the following day, when Zbishko and Matzko arrived in Bogdanetz, they began to examine what was once their home, and soon discovered that Zych was right when he said that they would have to put up with a great many inconveniences. The affairs of the settlement itself were not in such bad condition, however. There were several pieces of cleared land, cultivated by the former peasants of Bogdanetz, or those settled by the abbot. There was formerly much more cultivated land in Bogdanetz, but ever since the battle of Plovtzi, when the race of Gradii were almost annihilated, there was a lack of working hands, and after the attack of the Silesian Germans,

and the war of the Grimalites with the Naleutchaus, the fertile fields of Bogdanetz were largely overgrown with wood.

Matzko alone could not restore things to their original condition. In vain he had sought, during several years, to attract free peasants from Kshesna by liberal offers. They preferred to remain on their own lands. However, he found some homeless people, took some prisoners at various wars, married them, and settled them in comfortable habitations. Thus the settlement began to grow again. But affairs were still unsatisfactory, and when an opportunity offered itself Matzko unhesitatingly mortgaged the entire tract, thinking that, firstly, the rich abbot would manage the estate better than he could; and, secondly, that war would bring him and Zbishko both men and money.

The abbot's management was really excellent. He enlarged the working force of Bogdanetz by five peasant families, made additions to the flocks, built a granary, and made stables of plaited rush. But as he did not always live in Bogdanetz, he gave little care to the house, and Matzko, who imagined that on returning home he would find the little house surrounded by a trench and palisade, found it in the same condition in which he left it, except that the house began to incline, and the walls seemed lower; in fact, it was in a condition of collapse.

The domicile consisted of a large entrance hall, two large rooms, with an adjoining closet and kitchen. Square holes, cut in the walls and covered with cow's bladders, served as windows; and in the middle of the room there was a fire-place, the smoke of which made its way into the open through chinks in the ceiling. The blackened ceiling was at one time used for curing meats. In the heyday of Bogdanetz's prosperity, stuck on pieces of wood, there were always hanging on that ceiling hams of wild boar, of bear and of elk, the tenderloin parts of deer and wild goats, and immense strings of sausages. Now the ceiling was bare, as were also the shelves on the walls. In other houses these shelves usually held leaden and earthen dishes. Only the walls under these shelves were not so bare.

Zbishko ordered the Turks to hang up on the walls coats of mail, helmets, long and short swords, hunting-poles, spears, shields, axes and caparisons. The weapons were blackened by the smoke, and it was necessary to polish them quite often; but then they were ready at hand, and the worms did not eat into the wooden parts of the weapons. The more valuable articles Matzko had carefully stowed in the closet, which served him as bed-chamber.

In the front rooms, near the windows, stood pine tables and benches, at which the masters of the house, together with their menials, were taking their meals. People who, during long years of warfare, were subjected to constant privations, required but little, but in Bogdanetz there was felt a scarcity of bread, flour and other provisions, and especially of dishes. The peasants brought all they could, but Matzko relied chiefly on his neighbors, and was not disappointed—at all events not so far as Zych was concerned.

The day after his arrival Matzko was sitting on a stump in front of his house, enjoying the beautiful autumn weather, when Yagenka rode into the courtyard on her dark horse. A peasant who was cutting wood near the fence attempted to help her alight, but she jumped off herself and approached Matzko, all out of breath and flushed.

"Blessed be the name of God! I come to pay the respects of father, and to inquire about your health."

"I am no worse than I was on the road," answered Matzko. "I can at least sleep well in my own nest."

"But you must be very uncomfortable without any attendance."

"We are a strong race. There are no comforts here, it is true, but we are not in want. We shall have a bull and two sheep killed, so there will be meat enough. The women brought us some flour and eggs; but what we need most is dishes."

"I have two wagon loads coming here—one with dishes, the other with eatables—cakes, flour, salt pork, dried mushrooms. There is also a bottle of wine, a bottle of mead, two beds—a little of everything we had in the house."

Matzko, who was always happy at the acquisition of things for the household, stroked her head and said:

"May God reward you and your father! As soon as we have things arranged, we shall settle with you."

"God forbid! We are not Germans, to take back that which we give."

"Then, may God reward you tenfold! Your father said that you were a good housekeeper. So you have managed Zgojhelitzi for an entire year?"

"What of it? If you happen to need anything, send to us for it; only send some one who can understand your instructions, and not some stupid servant who cannot tell what he was sent for."

Yagenka looked around. Matzko noticed it, smiled, and asked:



"What are you seeking?"

"I am not seeking anyone."

"I will send Zbishko to thank you and your father for your kindness. Do you like Zbishko?"

"I did not look at him."

"Then look at him now. There he is coming."

Zbishko was returning from the horse pond, and as he espied her he quickened his pace. He wore an elk-skin peasant coat and a felt cap, which is usually worn under the helmet. His hair, cut straight above his eyebrows, hung down on the sides in golden curls. He walked quickly, was tall, beautiful, and looked like an armor-bearer of some eminent knight.

Yagenka turned to Matzko, desiring to show that she came to see him exclusively, but Zbishko greeted her gaily, caught her hand and raised it to his lips.

"Why do you kiss my hand?" asked Yagenka. "I am not a priest."

"Do not resist; such is courtly custom."

"It were none too much if you kissed the other hand also, for all the things she brought us," put in Matzko.

"What has she brought?" asked Zbishko, glancing around the courtyard, but he only saw the dark horse tied to a post.

"The wagons have not arrived yet, but they will be here soon," answered Yagenka.

Matzko began to recount all the gifts named by Yagenka, and when he mentioned the two beds Zbishko said:

"I can sleep on a bison skin as comfortably as on a bed; but, nevertheless, I thank you for thinking of me."

"It was not I—it was papa," answered the girl, reddening the face. "If you prefer to sleep on the skin, you are free to do so."

"I prefer to sleep on anything I can get. After a battle, in the field, it often happened that I had a dead Crusader for a pillow."

"Have you really killed a Crusader? It cannot be."

Zbishko, instead of answering, laughed, while Matzko exclaimed:

"Why, girl, you don't seem to know him! He did nothing else but kill Germans. He can fight with lance or axe; and when he sees a German nothing can restrain him. At Krakow he attempted to fight the envoy, Lichtenstein, and came near losing his head. As to the Frisians, I will tell you how we took their attendants and booty enough to redeem Bogdanetz."

Here Matzko began to describe the duel with the Frisians and other adventures and exploits. They fought from behind

walls and in the open field with the most celebrated Knights of foreign lands. They fought with Germans; they fought with Frenchmen, and with Englishmen, and with Burgundians. There were in the whirlpool of battles, where horses, men, weapons, Germans and Poles were all combined in one mass. And what sights they had seen! They had seen German castles built of red brick; Lithuanian towns, with houses made of wood; and churches the like of which one does not see around Bogdanetz; and grand cities, with endless lines of polished dwellings; and impassable forests, in which the Lithuanian little gods, expelled from their temples, were unceasingly squeaking at night; and many other wonders. And wherever it was necessary to fight, Zbishko was always in the front ranks, to the wonder of the most celebrated Knights.

Yagenka seated herself on a water trough, beside Matzko, and with open mouth listened to Matzko's account of their adventures; and turning her head, as if it were on a pivot, now to Matzko, now to Zbishko. She looked at the young knight with growing wonder. Finally, when Matzko took breath, she sighed and said:

"How glorious it is to be born a boy!"

But Zbishko, who, during his uncle's narration, also attentively looked at Yagenka, answered:

"You are pretty enough as you are."

In a voice partly mournful, partly displeased, Yagenka said:

"You have seen prettier ones than I am."

Zbishko, without prevaricating, could have told her that he had seen few like her. Yagenka was in the bloom of health, youth and strength. It was not exaggeration for the old abbot to say that she resembled partly a white hazel tree, partly a young pine tree. Everything about her was beautiful: the erect figure, the broad shoulders, the breast, as graceful and symmetrical as a piece of sculpture; and the red lips, and the blue, radiant eyes. She was dressed with more care on this occasion than when she was hunting in the forest. Around her neck was a string of red beads; a peasant coat of green cloth hung on her shoulders; a striped homespun skirt and a pair of new shoes made up her attire. Even old Matzko's attention was attracted by her costume, and, looking at Yagenka, he asked:

"Why are you dressed as if for a holiday?"

But Yagenka, instead of answering, shouted:

"The wagons are coming—there!"

She ran toward the approaching wagons, Zbishko following her. The unloading lasted till sunset, to the great satisfaction

of Matzko, who examined every article separately, while he lavishly praised Yagenka.

It was dark when the girl began to prepare for her return. As she put her foot into the stirrup, Zbishko suddenly caught her in his arms, and, before she could utter a word, raised her and placed her in the saddle. She turned as purple as the dawn, and, leaning over to Zbishko, she said, in a low voice:

"Oh, how strong you are!"

In the dark Zbishko did not notice her confusion and red face. He began to laugh, and asked:

"Are you not afraid of wild beasts? It is growing dark."

"There is a lance in the wagon; hand it to me."

Zbishko did as requested.

"Good night!"

"Good night!"

"May God bless you. To-morrow, or the day after, I will come to Zgojhelitzi to thank you and your father for your neighborly attentions."

"Come. We shall be pleased. G'long!" and in a moment she disappeared in the bush.

Zbishko returned to his uncle, to whom he said:

"It is time for you to get indoors."

Matzko, without moving from his place, said:

"Ah, what a girl! Even the courtyard seems brighter for her presence."

A moment of silence ensued. Matzko was in a reflective mood, and looking at the glistening stars, he said in an undertone:

"She is sociable and understands the needs of a household, although only fifteen years old."

"Yes," said Zbishko, "and old Zych loves her like the apple of his eye."

"He said that the Mochidolians will come to court her, and there is a drove of fillies and foals grazing on his fields."

"The Mochidolian woods are very boggy, are they not?"

"Yes, but there are many beaver nests in those bogs."

There was silence again. Matzko looked askance at Zbishko, and asked:

"Why are you so sad? What are you thinking of?"

"You see, Yagenka reminded me of Danusia, and my heart pained me."

"Let us go inside," said the old man; "it is late."

He rose with difficulty, and leaned on Zbishko, who led him into the house.

Matzko insisting, Zbishko went to Zgojhelitzi the very next

day. The old knight ordered Zbishko to take two servants with him and dress himself in his best clothes, in order that proper honors might be shown to Zych, and their thanks be offered in a becoming manner.

Zbishko yielded to the old man's entreaties, and drove away dressed as for a wedding—in a white silk coat, fringed with gold, which he had acquired in the war.

Zych received him with open arms, with joy and song; and Yagenka, as soon as he crossed the threshold, stood as if transfixed, and the vessels of wine fell from her hands. She thought that some prince had arrived.

The girl quailed, seemed much disturbed, and sat silently rubbing her eyes from time to time, as if she had just awakened from sleep.

The inexperienced Zbishko thought that, for some reason unknown to him, his arrival displeased Yagenka, so he spoke only to Zych, praising his liberality, and expressing his admiration for their house, which was in reality very unlike that of the Bogdanetz home.

Here the evidences of comfort were to be seen everywhere. The walls of the rooms were adorned with frames, ornamented with horn, thinly planed and polished, and almost as transparent as glass. There was no fire-place in the centre of the room, but instead a huge hearthstone rose from the floor, which was of pine board, cleanly scrubbed. The walls were adorned with weapons, while on neat shelves gleamed dishes as bright as the sun; and there were also visible neatly arranged rows of spoons, two of which were of real silver! Here and there hung a valuable rug, brought from the war, or bought of itinerant merchants. Under the tables lay gigantic skins of bisons and wild bulls.

Zych eagerly displayed his riches, constantly repeating that all these were intended as part of Yagenka's housekeeping outfit.

He took Zbishko even to the bedroom, which was permeated with the odor of pitch and mint, and on the ceiling of which hung bundles of wolf, fox, raccoon and beaver skins. He showed him a storehouse full of cheese, wax and mead, barrels of flour, biscuits, hemp and dried mushrooms. He then took him to the granaries, stalls and styes, and to the sheds where the wagons, hunting paraphernalia and fishing nets were kept—all of which so blinded Zbishko that when they returned for supper he could not help expressing his wonder.

"Zgojhlitzi is a place to live, not to die in!" he said.

"There is about the same order kept in Mochidoli," answered

Zych. "Do you remember the place? It is nearer to Bogdanetz. At one time our fathers fought over the question of the frontier and challenged each other to combat; but I shall not pick quarrels."

They touched glasses. Then Zych asked:

"Would you like to sing something?"

"No," answered Zbishko, "but I will listen to you with great pleasure."

"Zgojhelitzi, you see, will descend to the whelps. I hope it will not be the cause of their fighting each other."

"What whelps?"

"Well, the boys—the brothers of Yagenka."

"They will not have to suck their paws in winter."

"No; but Yagenka will not starve, even in Mochidoli."

"There is little danger of that."

"But why do you not eat and drink? Yagenka, pour out some mead!"

"I have eaten and drunk as much as I can."

"When you are full, then ungirdle yourself. What a wonderful girdle! You must have brought considerable booty from Lithuania!"

"We cannot complain," answered Zbishko, seizing the opportunity of showing that the owners of Bogdanetz were full of dash and enterprise. "Part of the booty we sold at Krakow for twenty pounds of silver."

"Is it possible! Why, you can buy an entire village with it!"

"Most of the spoils were mere rags. Uncle expects to die soon, so he sold them."

"I know. Campaigning in Lithuania pays. In my time I had a desire to go there, but was afraid."

"Of whom? The Crusaders?"

"Oh, who fears the Germans! While one is alive there is nothing to fear, and when one is dead there is not even time left for fear. I feared the heathen little gods or devils. They are as numerous in the woods as ants."

"But since their temples were burned, what were they to do? Formerly they lived in opulence, and now they are reduced to mushrooms and ants."

"Have you seen them?"

"I have not seen them myself, but I have heard that they were seen. They thrust out their shaggy hands, begging for something to eat."

"Matzko, too, said that they were begging," said Yagenka.

"Of course, he told me that on the road," added Zych. "And no wonder! Although this has long been a Christian country,

one may sometimes hear someone laughing in the woods; and even in the houses it is safer to place a dish of food overnight for the imps of darkness—although the priests scold us—otherwise they scratch the walls so that one cannot sleep. Yagenka, please put a dish at the door."

Yagenka placed at the door an earthen dish full of dumplings, and Zych said:

"The priests are angry and threaten. The glory of the Lord Jesus will not diminish on account of a dozen dumplings; yet many persons believe that the evil one, when sated and satisfied, will guard a man against fire and vicious persons." Then he turned to Zbishko. "Will you not unbutton your coat and sing something?"

"Would not Lady Yagenka sing first?"

"Let us sing by turns," exclaimed Zych, rejoicing. "There is a lad in the house who will play the accompaniment on a wooden pipe. Call him in!"

The lad came, seated himself on a bench, put "the squeaker" between his lips, spread his fingers and looked at those present, to see to whom he would have to play the accompaniment.

A dispute arose as to who should sing first. Finally, Zych ordered his daughter to set an example, and though Yagenka was timid and disconcerted, she nevertheless rose from the bench, hid her hands under her apron and began to sing the song first heard by Zbishko at the inn of "The Wild Bull" from the lips of Danusia.

In a few moments Zbishko listened with wide open eyes; then sprang to his feet and shouted:

"Where did you learn that song?"

Yagenka looked at him with surprise.

"Why, everybody sings it. What is the matter?"

Zych thought that Zbishko had drunk too much. He turned his happy face to Zbishko and said:

"Ungirdle yourself; you will presently feel better."

Zbishko overcame his agitation, and said to Yagenka:

"Forgive me. Your song suddenly reminded me—. Continue the song."

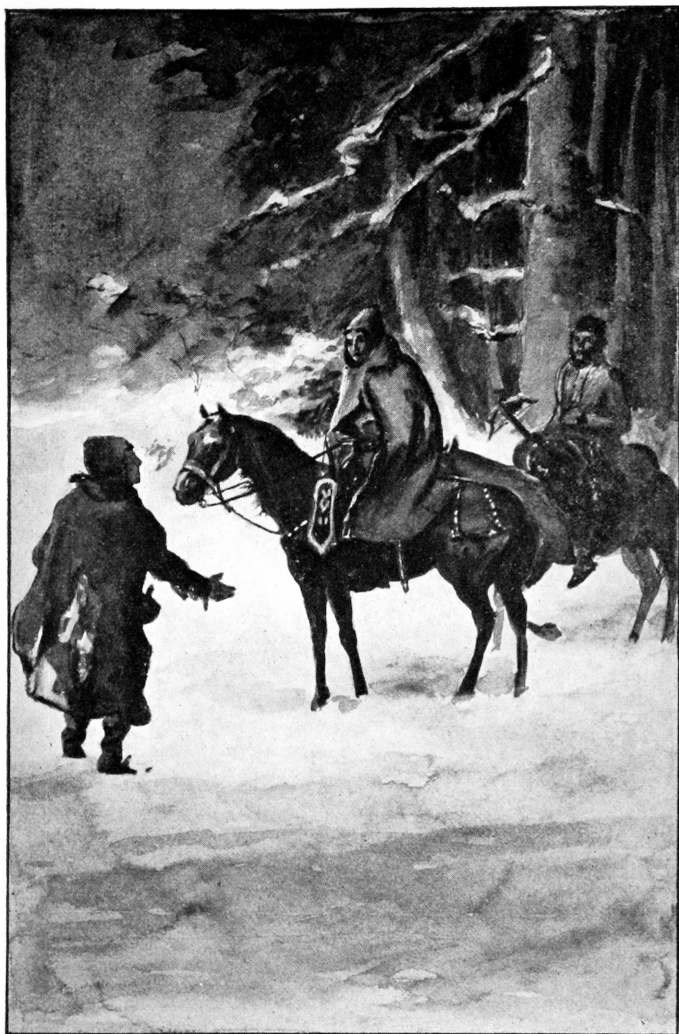
"Does it sadden you to hear it?"

"Oh, no!" said Zbishko, with a quiver in his voice. "I could listen to it all night."

He sat down, covered his face with his hands and was silent.

Yagenka sang another verse, and, having finished it, she noticed a tear rolling down Zbishko's fingers.

She quickly approached him, seated herself on the bench, and nudged him with her elbow.



"Zhishko looked at the man with suspicion, his appearance and outlandish accent having made an unfavorable impression." See page 196.





"Now, what is the matter? I don't wish to see you cry. Tell me, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing!" he answered, with a sigh. "There would be too much to tell—one cannot recall the past."

"Will you take a little sweet wine?"

"Wise girl!" exclaimed Zych. "Why do you address each other as 'you'? Why not call him Zbishko, while he can call you Yagenka. You have known each other from childhood."

Then he turned to his daughter.

"And that he has often beaten you does not matter. He would not do so now."

"No, I would not!" cheerfully said Zbishko. "Let her beat me now, if she desires."

Yagenka, desiring to put him in complete good humor, clenched her fist, and, laughing, began to thump him.

"That is for my broken nose! And that! And that!"

"Some wine!" shouted the host.

Yagenka ran to the storehouse, and in a minute returned with a pitcher of wine, two beautiful cups, ornamented with silver flowers, and two small cheeses, the odor from which was perceptible at a great distance.

Zych—he was already fuddled—deeply moved, seized the pitcher, pressed it to his breast, and apparently thinking it was Yagenka, said:

"My darling daughter! Poor orphan! What shall I, unfortunate that I am, do in Zgojhelitzi when you are taken away from me!"

"You should not worry," said Zbishko.

In the twinkling of an eye Zych became mirthful.

"Ha, ha, ha! The girl is fifteen years old, and is already after the men! She rejoices when she sees a man."

"What a base slander! Papa, I will leave you," said Yagenka.

"Do not go away; we feel good in your presence," and he mysteriously winked at Zbishko.

"Two of them are calling—young Wolk, the son of old Wolk of Bjhosaw, and Pshetzlas of Rogow. If they found you here, they would roar at you, as they roar at each other."

"Small fry!" said Zbishko, and, turning to Yagenka, he asked: "And which of the two do you like best?"

"Neither."

"Wolk is a hard fellow!" remarked Zych.

"Let him howl in another direction!"

"And Pshetzlas?"

Yagenka began to laugh.

"And Pshetzlas." she said, turning to Zbishko, "is so overgrown with hair that one cannot see his eyes, and is as fat as a bear."

Zbishko struck his forehead.

"Oh! Have you not some bear's fat in your house? Uncle needs it for medicine, and I could not find any in Bogdanetz."

"We had some," said Yagenka, "but the servant took it into the yard to smear the bows, and the dogs have eaten it up. What a pity!"

"Was there none left?"

"They have cleaned it out."

"Well, then, I shall have to look for it in the woods."

"Let us make a battue; there are bears in plenty; and if you have no hunting weapons, we will furnish them."

"I cannot wait. I will go to some beehive and wait overnight."

"Take a few men with you."

"They may frighten the beast."

"How then? Will you take a bow?"

"Of what use would a bow be in the dark? The moon does not shine now. I will take a hunting pole, a good ave, and will repair to the woods alone to-morrow."

Yagenka was silent for a moment. Uneasiness was reflected on her face.

"Last year a hunter named Besdouch went there, and was severely torn by a bear," said Yagenka. "It is not a safe undertaking. When a bear sees a man near a beehive he rises on his hind paws."

"If he ran one could not catch him," answered Zbishko.

Zych, who was dozing, suddenly awoke, and began to sing:

"Kuba went to work again,  
While I strolled in the lane.  
Go, then, Kuba, your humble way,  
Kassia will drive the blues away.  
Hop! Hop!"

"There are two, you know. Wolk of Bjhosow and Pshetzlas of Rogaw. And you——"

But Yagenka, fearing that Zych might say too much, hastily went over to Zbishko and asked:

"When are you going? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow, after nightfall."

"To what hives?"

"To our own, at Bogdanetz; those that lie near the frontier, by the Radzikow bogs. They say it is easy to come upon Bruin in that neighborhood."

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## CHAPTER VI.

Zbishko, as he said he would, went on a bear hunt, Matzko having grown worse. At first the invalid was sustained by the anticipation of his nephew's return and the household cares; but on the third day the fever reappeared, and the pain in his side was such that he was compelled to take to bed. Zbishko went to the woods during the day, examined the hives, discovered footprints near the bog, and made arrangements for the attendance of the hive-keeper, Wavrek, who possessed two sheep dogs.

The two pitched their tent, brought the dogs, smeared some tree-trunks with honey to attract the wild beast, then returned home. At night he donned an elk skin coat without arms, a wire cap, took a hunting pole and a broad, steel axe, and departed. At milking time he was already at his destination, and having chosen a convenient hiding-place, he made the sign of the cross and sat down to watch for the bear.

The red rays of the setting sun glistened through the leaves of the fir trees; ravens jostled each other on the tree-tops, croaking and flapping their wings; hares, rustling through the fallen leaves, were making their way to the water; in the underbrush the chirping of birds was slowly dying away.

All was not quiet yet in the woods. A pack of wild boars, with great noise and grunting, ran past Zbishko; then came a long chain of galloping elks, the head of each close to the tail of the one in front of him. Under their hoofs the crackling of dry leaves resounded. The entire forest trembled, and the elks, tinted red by the setting sun, were rushing to the bog, where they found convenient and safe shelter. Finally, the evening twilight began to blaze, so that the tops of the firs seemed on fire, and it began to darken. The forest was falling asleep. Darkness rose from the earth and crept up to the flashing twilight, which gradually began to give way to dense darkness.

"Now," thought Zbishko, "if the wolves do not howl, all will be quiet."

He wished he had taken a bow with him; he could have easily bagged a boar or an elk.

From the bog repressed voices reached him, which seemed like moaning.

Zbishko looked in the direction of the bog with some misgiving, because the peasant, Radzik, who had lived there at one time, had disappeared with his family—as if the earth had swallowed them. Some people said that highwaymen had carried them away; but there were others who later saw footprints that were unlike those of man or beast. It was intended to invite a priest from Kshesna to consecrate the ground, but there was no occasion for it, for no one wished to settle there, and the clay hut was soon washed away by rain. So the place retained its bad reputation. It is true, the hive-keeper, Wavrek, paid no attention to it, and slept there in his hut, but, then, it was said that there was something wrong with Wavrek himself. Zbishko, armed with hunting-pole and axe, did not fear wild beasts, but was uneasy at the thought of evil spirits, and was glad when these voices finally ceased.

The last reflections of the twilight had disappeared and peaceful night had settled down. The wind had calmed, and in the tops of the firs there was not the slightest sound. Amid the universal quiet, here and there, a cone fell to the ground with a sharp rap. Were it not for that Zbishko could have heard his own breathing.

For a long time he thus sat in deep reflection, thinking at first of the bear that must appear at any moment; then of Danusia, who, with the Mazovian court, had gone to distant lands. He recalled how, at parting, he had taken her in his arms, how the tears ran down her cheeks; he recalled her bright little face, her streaming hair, her scented garland, her singing, her red, pointed shoes, which he had kissed at parting, and everything that passed between them from the moment of their acquaintance; and he was so grief-stricken and was possessed of such a longing for her, that he became entirely overcome by his feelings, forgot that he was in the forest, and said to himself:

“I will go to you; I cannot live without you.”

And he felt that he must go to Mazovia, else he would pine away at Bogdanetz. He thought of Yurand and his strange obstinacy, which incited Zbishko the more to a determination to go and solve the mystery of his rejection of his suit; to find out what the obstacles were—whether they could not be removed by challenging someone to mortal combat. It seemed to him that Danusia was stretching out her hands to him and calling: “Come to me, Zbishko, come!” How could he resist such an appeal?

He did not sleep, but plainly saw his beloved in a dream, or as an apparition. There was Danusia riding beside the

Princess, picking the strings of her lute and singing, at the same time thinking of him. She was thinking that she would soon see him, and looked behind her to see if he was coming while he was sitting in a dark forest.

At this point Zbishko's thoughts reverted to his present position, not only because he was thinking of the forest, but also because his keen ear noted a rustling sound behind him.

He clutched his hunting-pole and listened attentively.

The rustling came nearer, and was soon heard quite distinctly. Under the careful steps of someone there was a crackling of twigs and fallen leaves. Someone was approaching him. At times the noise ceased, as if the animal had stopped at some tree; then followed such deep silence that it became oppressive; then, again, he heard the sound of slow, careful steps. The approach of the unknown was so cautious that Zbishko was seized with wonder.

"'Old Bruin' has probably scented that there were dogs here," he said to himself; "or, perhaps, it is a wolf that has scented me."

The steps died away entirely, but Zbishko heard distinctly that someone had stopped within twenty or thirty feet of him and lay down on the ground. He looked around again and again, but could not distinguish anything, although the fir trees stood out plainly enough in the darkness. All he could do was to wait and watch.

And he waited so long that wonder seized him again.

"A bear would not come to sleep under a beehive, while a wolf would scent me and would not wait until morning."

Suddenly he was overcome with fear. What if some evil spirit had crept from the bog and was stealing toward him from behind? What if he should suddenly be caught by the slimy arms of a drowned man, or the green eyes of a vampire looked him in the face? What if piercing laughter broke out close to him, or a green head on spider legs showed itself from behind the fir trees?

He felt his hair standing on end under the wire cap.

But in a moment the noise was heard in front of him, and more distinctly than before. Zbishko gave a sigh of relief. The same "mysterious thing" could have approached him from behind, and now it was advancing in front of him. That was not so terrible. Zbishko took a better hold of the hunting-pole, silently raised it, and waited.

Suddenly he heard above his head the noise of the firs, a wind from the direction of the bog blew into his face, and the odor usually emitted by bears reached his nostrils.

There was no more doubt Bruin was coming.

In a moment fear had left Zbishko entirely, and, bending his head, he strained his eyes and ears. Heavy, distinct footsteps were approaching him; the odor became more penetrating. Soon Zbishko heard a snoring and growling.

"I hope there is only one!" thought Zbishko.

At that moment he saw before him the huge, dark silhouette of an animal, which, walking with the wind, could not scent Zbishko till the last moment, the more so because the trees around were smeared with honey.

"You are welcome, Bruin!" shouted Zbishko, springing from behind the fir tree.

The bear uttered a short growl, as if surprised at the suddenness of the meeting, but was too near the man to attempt to seek safety in flight. In a moment he raised himself on his hind legs and spread his fore legs, as if proposing to embrace a foe.

Zbishko was waiting for the bear to assume that very position. He drew himself together, sprang forward, and with the entire strength of his powerful hands, and throwing his entire weight against it, he plunged the hunting-pole into the breast of the animal.

The entire forest trembled from the piercing growl which ensued. The bear caught the pole with his paws, intending to pull it out, but the hooks stuck in his flesh, and Bruin, feeling pain, emitted even more terrible growls. In his attempt to reach Zbishko he leaned against the pole, driving it deeper into his own flesh. Not knowing how deep it went, Zbishko held fast to the shaft.

The man and the beast entered into a death struggle. The forest trembled from the growls, in which were heard rage and despair. The axe was beyond Zbishko's reach; and the bear, grasping the pole, now quivering in his flesh, swayed it with Zbishko, notwithstanding the pain caused him by every movement. Thus the terrible struggle dragged, and Zbishko understood that in the end his strength was likely to be exhausted. Besides, he might fall, and in such case his death was certain. So he gathered all his strength, strained his arms, spread his legs, bent his back like a bow, to prevent his being upset, and through his clenched teeth repeated:

"Your death or mine!"

He was seized with such rage that at that moment he really would have preferred to perish rather than lose the bear. Finally, catching his foot in the root of a tree, he staggered, and would have fallen but for a dark figure that suddenly ap-

peared before him. Another pole penetrated the bear, and at the same time a voice called:

"Now for the axe!"

Carried away by the struggle, Zbishko did not stop for a moment to think of where the aid came from, but leaping to the spot where the axe lay, he clutched it quickly and bounded back. With this weapon he struck the bear repeatedly, and with great force. The animal weakened, swayed helplessly from side to side, breaking the pole under his weight, and with a loud snort fell to the ground. His convulsions were short.

The silence that ensued was only interrupted by the heavy breathing of Zbishko, who leaned against the trunk of a tree, for his legs were giving away under him. It was some minutes before he raised his head, looked at the figure before him, and, frightened at the thought that it might not be a man, asked:

"Who is there?"

"Yagenka," answered a female voice.

Zbishko was dumfounded and would not believe his own eyes. But his doubt did not last long, for Yagenka's voice was heard again:

"I will strike a light."

The sound of steel striking against flint was heard, and by the light produced by the falling sparks, Zbishko saw the white face, the dark eyebrows, and the lips with which the girl puffed into the smoldering tinder. Zbishko understood that she had come to his aid; that without her timely aid he might have perished, and he felt such gratitude toward her that, without considering long, he embraced her and kissed both her cheeks. The flint and steel fell from her hands.

"Let me go! Why do you kiss me?" she said, without removing her face from Zbishko's, and, as if accidentally, touched Zbishko's lips with her own several times.

He released his hold of her and said:

"God bless you! I do not know what the result would have been if you had not come to my aid."

Yagenka, seeking in the dark for the steel and tinder, began to explain:

"I was anxious for your safety. Bezdouch also went with hunting-pole and axe, and a bear tore him to pieces. God forbid that such a thing should happen to you! It would grieve Matzko, and he is barely alive even now. Well, so I took a hunting-pole and came here."

"So it was you I heard coming from behind that fir tree?"

"Yes."

"And I thought it was some evil spirit."

"I was not a little afraid myself. It is not safe to be without fire near that Radzikow bog."

"Why did you not call me?"

"I thought that you might drive me away."

And she began to strike fire again; then placed on the tinder some dry twigs, which immediately burst into a bright flame.

"Get some dead wood," said Yagenka, "and we shall have a fire."

In a few minutes there was under the fir trees a bright fire, which threw a light on the brown carcass of the bear, stretched in a pool of blood.

"A pretty large beast!" said Zbishko, with a shade of pride in his voice.

"The head is almost split in two! My God!"

She stooped and felt the bear's breast, then rose, and with a joyful face, said:

"There is fat enough for two years!"

"Is your hunting-pole broken?"

"That is the trouble—what shall I say to papa?"

"Why?"

"Papa would not have permitted me to go, so I waited till they had all retired."

In a moment she added:

"Do not let them know that I was here, for they will laugh at me."

"Very well."

For a long time they babbled over the carcass of the bear, looking like two wood-nymphs in the bright light of the burning woodpile.

Zbishko looked at the beautiful face of Yagenka, lit up by the reddish reflection of the fire, and said with involuntary wonder:

"There is no one like you in the world. You are heroic enough to go to war!"

For a moment she looked him straight in the eyes, then answered almost with sadness:

"I know it—only do not laugh at me."

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## CHAPTER VII.

On the following day Yagenka herself heated a large pot of bear's fat. The first quart Matzko drank willingly, because the fat was fresh, was not burned underneath, and was scented with angelica, which Yagenka, expert at medicine making, had



put into the pot. Matzko's spirits rose immediately, and he began to hope that he would recover.

"That was just what I needed," he said. "When everything is greased inside the cursed splinter may come out in time."

The other quarts were not so agreeable to his taste, but he drank them from necessity. Besides, Yagenka always encouraged him:

"You will be well. I know of a similar case, where the fat drove out the iron. Only it will be necessary to apply beaver's fat when the wound opens."

"Have you any beaver's fat?"

"Yes. And if fresh fat should be necessary, I will go with Zbishko to their nests. There are beavers in plenty here, but it would be desirable to promise an offering to some saint who helps the curing of wounds."

"I thought of that myself, but I am not quite sure to whom I should promise. Saint Gregory is the patron saint of the knights; he guards the warrior against danger, and in case of necessity, fills him with courage. It is said that he often personally steps into the ranks of the just and helps in the contest against the enemies of God. But one who willingly fights seldom troubles himself about wounds. We must choose another saint with whom Saint Gregory does not compete. Every saint in heaven has his own duties, his household—everybody knows that! One does not interfere with the business of another, because that might cause disagreements, and it is not seemly for saints in heaven to be quarreling and disputing. Kosma and Damianus are also great saints; physicians pray to them not to extirpate sickness, for otherwise they would have a lack of patients and would have nothing to eat. Saint Apollonia cures toothache; Saint Liborius cures gravel. But these would not help my case. When the abbot arrives he will tell us to whom to apply. Not every cleric knows all the divine mysteries; that is not given to everyone, though they have their heads shaven."

"And if you make a vow to the Lord Jesus himself?"

"That He is above everybody is true; but my doing so would be as if, for instance, your father were to pummel my peasant and I were to go to Krakow to make complaint to the king. What would the king answer me? He would answer thus: 'I am the master of the entire kingdom and you come to me with your peasant! Are there no courts? Can't you go to my castellan in the city?' The Lord Jesus is the Master of the entire world—do you understand? and for all affairs there are saints."

"I will tell you this," began Zbishko, who entered at the end of the conversation. Make a vow to our deceased queen,

that if she helps you, you will make a pilgrimage to her tomb in Krakow. Have not wonders been performed before our own eyes? Why seek foreign saints, when we have our own Mistress, better than the others?"

"Yes, if I knew that she helps the healing of wounds!"

"Even if she does not, what saint would dare to grumble? And if one does, then the Lord God himself would reprimand him. Do not forget that she is no spinner, but a Polish Queen!"

"Who converted to Christianity the last heathen land? That was said wisely," answered Matzko. "She must be occupying a high place in the councils of God, and it is true that some insignificant saint could not do anything against her. I will do as you advise, provided I get well."

The advice was pleasing also to Yagenka, who could not conceal her wonder at the wisdom of Zbishko.

That same evening Matzko made a solemn vow, and from that moment continued to drink bear's fat with even greater hope, expecting from day to day to recover his health. However, at the expiration of a week that hope began to fade. The old knight complained that the fat was "boiling" in his stomach and that near the last rib something like a button was growing. In ten days he was still worse; the button had grown immensely and was red, while Matzko himself became very weak, and as he became feverish again, began to prepare for death.

At midnight Matzko suddenly awakened Zbishko.

"Light a shaving quickly," he said. "There is something the matter with me, but I do not know whether it is good or bad."

Zbishko sprang to his feet, and, without striking a fire, began to blow the cinders on the hearth into a flame; he lit a piece of shaving dipped in pitch and went over to Matzko.

"What is the matter?"

"Something has pierced the button—probably the spear point. I am holding it, but cannot pull it out. I feel it grating under my nails."

"The splinter! It cannot be anything else! Hold fast and pull it."

Matzko moaned with pain, but thrust his fingers deeper, until he had a firm grasp of something hard, then gave a sudden pull and the object came out.

"O, Lord!"

"Is it out?" asked Zbishko.

"It is. How I am perspiring! Look, here it is!" And he showed to Zbishko the point of a badly made spear.

"Glory to God and to Queen Jadwiga! Now you will be well."

"I may improve, but the wound is very painful now," said Matzko. "There, the blood is streaming. The less trash there is in one's body, the sooner one improves. Yagenka has declared that my present condition demands an application of beaver's fat."

"To-morrow we will go hunting beavers."

Matzko at once felt considerably improved. He slept late, and, rising, he asked for food. He could no longer look on bear's fat, but he had an omelet made for him of two dozen eggs, Yagenka having found it prudent to allow no more. Matzko greedily ate the omelet with a loaf of bread, and drank a larger vessel of beer, and then ordered that Zych be called; so gay had he become.

Zbishko sent one of his Turks after a neighbor, who arrived on horseback just as the young people were preparing for the beaver hunt.

At first the old men joked, laughed and sang while drinking mead, then they began to speak of the children, each praising his own.

"What a fine lad Zbishko is!" said Matzko. "There is not another one like him in the whole world. He is manly and as clever as a lynx, and a business man as well. When he was led to the place of execution in Krakow the girls screamed from the windows, as if they were being pinched. And what girls! Daughters of knights and castellans, without mentioning all sorts of beauties and townswomen."

"They might be daughters of castellans and beauties, yet they are not better than my Yagenka!" answered Zych of Zgojhlitzl.

"Did I assert that they were? In the treatment of sick people there is no better girl than Yagenka."

"I also have nothing to say against Zbishko; he can bend a bow without a cord!"

"And can vanquish a bear single-handed. Did you see how he killed him? He split his head with one stroke."

"He split his head, but did not vanquish him single-handed. Yagenka helped him."

"She did? He never told me that."

"Because he promised her not to tell. It is not proper, you know, for a girl to prowl about the woods at night. She told me how it happened. Other girls would lie about it, but she is the soul of candor. To tell the truth, I was not pleased, because—who can tell—I was going to scold her; but she said:

'If I do not preserve my honor, you, papa, will not be able to do it. But you need not fear, Zbishko is an honorable knight.' "

"That is true. To-day they also went together."

"But they will return in the evening. The devil is more wicked at night, and in darkness a girl is less ashamed."

Matzko was silent a while, then said in an undertone:

"They seem to be glad to be together."

"H'm! If he had not made a vow to another."

"That, you see, is a custom of the knights. The young knight who has no lady is considered a fool. Zbishko promised, upon his honor as a knight, to bring to his lady peacock crests, which he must pluck from the heads of Crusaders. He must also fight Lichtenstein; but the abbot will release him from the other vows."

"The abbot will arrive to-day or to-morrow."

"Do you think so?" asked Matzko, and was silent for a moment. "And what is the good of that vow, since Yurand, point-blank, refused to give him his daughter! Whether he had promised her to another, or intended to consecrate her to the service of God, I do not know; but he said plainly that he would not give his daughter to Zbishko."

"I told you," said Zych, "that the abbot loves Yagenka as if she were his own daughter. When he last spoke to her he said: 'My relatives are all in the female line, but there will be more threads for you from that line than for them.' "

Matzko looked at Zych with uneasiness, and even with suspicion, and answered:

"You will not be unfair with us, I hope."

"Mochidoll is to go with Yagenka," evasively said Zych.

"Now?"

"Now. Another girl would not get it, but I will give it to her."

"Half of Bogdanetz belongs to Zbishko, and if God grant me health, I will put the affairs of the estate in good order. Do you like Zbishko?"

Zych blinked and answered:

"A bad feature of this case is that, when I mention his name Yagenka turns her face to the wall."

"And when you mention others?"

"When I mention others she sniffs and says: 'What else?' "

"That indicates her preference for Zbishko. With the aid of God, in the presence of Yagenka, he will forget the other. I am an old man, and yet I should forget her. Will you have some mead?"

"Yes."

"We will seek advice of the abbot, for he is a wise man! Among the abbots, as you know, there are secular men; but he, though he does not live among the monks, is a priest, and a priest will always give better advice than an ordinary man, because he is versed in letters and is near to the Holy Ghost. Your desire to give Mochidoli to your daughter is proper. If the Lord Jesus grant me health, I will win over from Wolk of Bghostow a few peasants. Each will receive a piece of good land, for there is plenty of unoccupied land in Bogdanetz. They can bid Wolk good-by after Christmas and come to Bogdanetz. Is that prohibited them, I wonder? In time we shall build a little town, a fine castle of oak, which we will surround by a trench. Let Zbishko and Yagenka go hunting together. They will get accustomed to each other and the lad will forget the other girl. Let them keep company. But what is the good of this protracted discussion? Would you marry your daughter to Zbishko?"

"I would. We have settled that long ago. Mochidoli and Bogdanetz will go to our grandchildren."

"Hail Gradii!" joyfully exclaimed Matzko. "May God send them children like hail! The abbot will baptize them."

"If he would only arrive," answered Zych, also overjoyed. "You have not been so cheerful for a long time."

"That is because there is joy in my heart. The splinter has come out; and as for Zbishko—you need not trouble yourself about him. Now I understand why they spoke so little to each other; and now they walk together and never lose sight of each other. Let us drink again!"

"All right!"

"Here is to the health of Zbishko and Yagenka!"

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## CHAPTER VIII.

The old man was not mistaken when he said that Zbishko and Yagenka were attached to each other. Yagenka, under the pretext of looking after the comfort of Matzko, often came to Bogdanetz with her father, or alone; Zbishko, out of gratitude, also visited Zgojhelitzi from time to time, so that in the course of time friendly relations grew up between them. This friendship was partly mingled with mutual admiration. The young and valiant Zbishko, who had already acquired renown in war, had part in tournaments and had visited imperial courts, seemed to Yagenka, in comparison with some Pshetzlas or

Wolk, a real chevalier, almost a grand duke; while Zbishko was often fascinated with the beauty of the girl. True to his Danusia, he, nevertheless, often gave expression to his admiration for Yagenka in the words, "Oh, she's a darling!" And when he helped her to mount her horse, and felt with the palm of his hand her symmetrical form, as perfect as a piece of sculpture, he became agitated, there was a tingling in his veins and he was lost in delightful admiration.

Yagenka, spirited by nature, and inclined to mock, or even to attack people, in the presence of Zbishko showed greater and greater humility, like a servant who is watching her master, seeking to serve and please him. Zbishko understood this attachment and was grateful for it; it afforded him great pleasure.

From the time Matzko had begun to drink the bear's fat they met almost daily, and when the old knight's health had improved they went together on a beaver hunt.

They took their bows, mounted their horses, and rode first to Mochidoli, which was to be Yagenka's marriage portion, and then to the woods, where they left their horses in the care of servants. The rest of the journey had to be made on foot, on account of the swamps and thick undergrowth. On the way Yagenka pointed to the blue forest, stretching beyond the broad meadow, and said:

"That forest belongs to Pshetzlas of Rogow."

"The one that desires to marry you?"

Yagenka laughed.

"He would take me if I were willing."

"You can easily defend yourself with the aid of Wolk. I heard that he has a bone to pick with him. It is strange that they have not already challenged each other to mortal combat."

"When papa left for the war he told them that if they resorted to fighting he should never permit them to come into his presence. What could they do then? When they meet at Zgojhelitzi they grunt at each other, then betake themselves to the Kshesna inn and drink until they fall under the table."

"They are fools."

"Why fools?"

"When Zych was away one or the other should have attacked Zgojhelitzi and carried you away by force. What would Zych have done on his return if he had found you with a child in your arms?"

Yagenka's blue eyes flashed.

"You think I would have submitted? Are there no people in Zgojhelitzi? Can't I handle a spear or bow? Let them try!

Not only would I drive him out, but would myself attack Rogow of Bjhosaw. Papa knew that he could safely leave me here and go to war, without worrying about me."

She began to so knit her brow and threateningly shake her bow that Zbishko burst into laughter.

"You should have been born a knight," he said, "and not a woman."

Yagenka calmed down and answered:

"Pshetzlas guarded me against Wolk, and Wolk guarded me against Pshetzlas. Finally, I am under the protection of the abbot, and he permits no one to trifle with him."

"Bah!" said Zbishko. "Everyone seems to be afraid of the abbot. And I swear, by Saint Gregory, that I am telling you the truth, that I should fear neither the abbot nor Zych, nor the inhabitants, nor you. I would carry you away."

Yagenka stopped, and raising her eyes on Zbishko, asked in a strange, soft and slow voice:

"Would you?"

Her lips parted; she turned as red as the twilight, and waited for an answer.

But Zbishko was apparently thinking of what he would do in the place of Pshetzlas or Wolk, for he shook his flaxen curls and said:

"Why should a girl fight with the men when she wishes to get married? Is there a third one? If not, you will have to choose one of the two; what else can you do?"

"Do not tell me that," the girl answered, with sadness.

"Why? I have been away for a long time and know little of what has been going on there. Is there any one around Zgojhelitzi that is more to your liking?"

"Oh, pester me not with such silly questions."

They proceeded silently, making their way through the thick underbrush, interwoven with wild hops. Zbishko led the way, breaking the wattled twigs; Yagenka, with her bow thrown over her shoulder, followed him like some goddess, protectress of the chase.

"There is a deep rivulet beyond that thicket, but I know the fording place," she said.

They soon reached the rivulet. Yagenka, familiar with the Mochidolian forest, easily found the ford, but it was seen that the recent rains had made the ford impassable. Zbishko, without asking the girl's permission, caught her in his arms.

"I could cross it myself," said Yagenka.

"Put your hands around my neck," answered Zbishko. He walked slowly, feeling the ground with his feet, while the girl,

following his command, held him tightly. They were near the other bank, when she said:

"Zbishko!"

"What is it?"

"I will marry neither Pshetzlas nor Wolk."

He carefully let her down on the sand, and said in a somewhat agitated voice:

"May God send you the very best man! He will not repent!"

They were not far from the Odstai lake. Now Yagenka led the way, turning around from time to time and placing her finger on her lips, in sign that it was necessary to be silent. They picked their way through old willows along the wet and low land. To the right they heard the chirping of birds, which at that time of autumn seemed strange to Zbishko.

"That is where the ducks winter. In frosty weather only near the banks of the lake does the water freeze. See that mist."

Zbishko looked through the branches of the trees and saw before him columns of vapor. It was the Odstai lake.

As they reached the bank of the lake the girl again placed a finger on her lips. She was the first to climb a stout old willow which was overhanging the lake. Zbishko followed her example. For a long time they lay motionless. The mist rolled before them, and only the plaintive piping of sea-gulls was heard overhead. At last a breeze came and swept the mist from the surface of the lake.

"Do you see any beavers?" whispered Zbishko.

"No. Be quiet!"

In a moment the breeze calmed down and perfect silence reigned.

Presently, on the surface of the water a head was outlined, then another, and finally, at a short distance from Zbishko, a larger beaver, with a fresh-cut twig in its mouth, made its way into the water and swam into the reeds, raising its head and pushing the twig forward. Zbishko, lying on a branch under Yagenka, suddenly saw her raising her elbow and inclining her head. She was apparently aiming at the animal, which now unsuspectingly swam in the open water at a distance not further than half the flight of an arrow.

Suddenly the b-r-r-r of a loosened bow-string was heard, and at the same time Yagenka exclaimed:

"I have it!"

Zbishko, in the twinkling of an eye, climbed up higher and looked through the branches. The beaver now dived, but pres-



ently reappeared on the surface, rolling and exposing his belly, which was of a lighter color than his back.

"Well hit! he will soon succumb," said Zbishko.

The movements of the animal grew constantly weaker, and it soon floated on the surface of the water, turned upside down.

"I will go and fetch it," said Zbishko.

"Do not go. There is a treacherous ooze on the shore, and whoever is not familiar with the place will surely drown."

"But how will we get him?"

"By nightfall he will be in Bogdanetz. Do not trouble yourself about it; and it is time to go home."

"But you shot him skillfully, I must say!"

"It is not my first."

"Other women dread to look at a bow, but you seem to have been born to it."

Hearing such praise, Yagenka smiled joyfully, and without saying anything, turned toward the old road. Zbishko began to question her about beavers' nests, and she told him how many there were at Mochidoli, at Zgojhelitzl, and how they prance on the hillocks and the lanes.

Suddenly she struck her forehead and said:

"Ah! I forgot my arrows on the willow. Wait here."

And before Zbishko could answer that he would go after them, she dashed away like an elk, and in a moment disappeared from his view.

Zbishko waited some time, and finally began to wonder at her long absence.

"Possibly she has lost her arrows and is seeking them," he said to himself. "I must see where she is."

But he had scarcely made a few steps when she appeared before him with laughing and ruddy face, holding the bow in her hand and the beaver thrown over her shoulder.

"God be with you!" exclaimed Zbishko. "How did you get him?"

"How? I got into the water, and that was all. It was not the first time I jumped into the water. But I feared to let you do it, because a person not familiar with the lake would surely be drawn in by the ooze."

"And I waited here for you like a fool. You cunning girl!"

"What could I do? Undress before you, or what?"

"So you had not forgotten the arrows?"

"No. I only wished to take you away from the shore."

"If I had followed you, how my eyes would have feasted! There would have been something to marvel at. I was about to follow you."

Yagenka wished to change the subject of conversation and said:

"Wring out my braid. The water is running down my back."

Zbishko took the braid in his hand and said:

"It would be better to unplait it; the wind will dry it quickly."

But Yagenka would not consent; the hair would catch at the branches.

"Matzko will get well now, for there is nothing better for a wound than bear fat inside and beaver fat outside. In two weeks he will be able to mount a horse."

"May God grant it!" answered Zbishko. "I am looking forward to his recovery as my deliverance. I cannot leave the sick man, and to remain here is very painful."

"Painful to remain here?" asked Yagenka. "Why?"

"Then Zych has told you nothing about Dansia?"

"He said something. I remember! She placed a garland upon your brow. I remember! Papa also said that every knight vows to do something for his lady. But he said that it does not matter—that it was merely a knightly custom. Some marry one and serve another lady at the same time. And this Danusia—what is she? Tell me what she is."

She came nearer to him and restlessly looked into his face. Zbishko did not pay the slightest attention to her agitated voice and look, and answered:

"Danusia is not only my lady but also my love. I do not speak of it to anyone; but I will tell it to you as a sister, because we have known each other since childhood. I would follow her to the end of the world, even to the Germans, or to the Tartars, because there is no other like her in the world. Let uncle stay in Bogdanetz, but I will go to her. Without her, what is Bogdanetz, the flocks, the forests, all the riches of the abbey? I will mount a horse and go. God is my witness that I will do what I promised her, or I will perish in the attempt."

"I was unaware of your high regard for the girl," she answered sadly.

Zbishko related to her how he had made her acquaintance; how he had immediately proclaimed a solemn vow to her, and everything that followed. He told her how happy he was to be able to go and fulfil his vow, after Matzko's recovery. He stopped his narrative only when he saw his servant at the edge of the forest, waiting with the horses.

Yagenka immediately mounted her horse and began to take leave of Zbishko.

"Let the servant carry the beaver. I will return to Zgojhelitzl."

"Will you not return to Bogdanetz? Zych is there."

"No. Papa has returned home, and has commanded me to come there."

"Well, may God reward you a hundredfold for the beaver."

"Good-by!"

Yagenka remained alone. For a moment she followed Zbishko with her eyes, and when finally he had disappeared behind the trees, she covered her face with her hands, as if to shield it from the sun's rays.

From under her fingers tears coursed down her cheeks, falling like pearls on the saddle and the horse's mane.

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## CHAPTER IX.

After the conversation with Zbishko, Yagenka, for three days, did not appear at Bogdanetz, but on the fourth day she came with the information of the abbot's arrival. Matzko received the news with some agitation. He had the means wherewith to redeem Bogdanetz, and even calculated that he would have enough left to enlarge the number of settlers, multiply the flocks, and for other household necessities. Nevertheless, the satisfactory settlement of affairs largely depended on the disposition of his rich relative. He could, for instance, remove the peasants he had settled there, or leave them at Bogdanetz, and thereby lower or enhance the value of the estate.

Matzko therefore questioned Yagenka in detail about the abbot; in what mood he had arrived; whether he was jovial or angry; what he had said about them, and when he was coming to Bogdanetz. Yagenka answered the questions intelligently, endeavoring to reassure the old knight.

She said that he was well and jovial, and was traveling with a large suite; that they all sang with Zych, and that he was as fond of secular songs as of religious chants. She also remarked that he inquired about Zbishko with great solicitude, and listened very attentively to Zych's version of Zbishko's adventures in Krakow.

"You know better than I do what to do," thoughtfully concluded Yagenka, "but I think that Zbishko ought to go forthwith and pay his respects to his elder relative, and not wait till the latter arrives at Bogdanetz."

This advice seemed to Matzko to be very sound. He sent for Zbishko and said to him:

"Dress in your best clothes, and go pay our respects to the abbot. Show him all honors, that he may take a liking to you also."

Then he turned to Yagenka.

"I should not be surprised if you were stupid, for you are a woman; but I must say that I am surprised at your intelligence. Tell me what shall we treat the abbot with on his arrival, and how shall we divert him?"

"As to food, he himself will tell you what he likes. He is fond of eating. It is necessary only to put plenty of saffron in his food."

Matzko clutched his head in despair.

"But where will I get saffron?"

"I will bring some," said Yagenka.

"May God send us more women like you!" exclaimed the delighted Matzko. "You are pretty, you are a good housewife, you are wise, and you are kind to your neighbors! Ah! were I young, I would ask your hand in marriage!"

Yagenka, unnoticed, looked at Zbishko, sighed and continued:

"I also brought dice, a cup and a cloth. The abbot always plays dice after dinner."

"That is an old habit of his; but he has often burst into a passion over the game."

"He does so even now. Sometimes he seizes the cup, throws it on the ground, and flies from the room; then he returns and laughs at his own anger. But you know him. If you do not contradict him, you will find him as good a man as there is in the world."

"Who can contradict him, since he is above all of us in mind?"

While this conversation was going on, Zbishko was dressing himself behind a partition. He came forth so beautiful that Yagenka was dazzled. She grew sad at the thought that he was not designed for her, and that he was already in love with another.

Matzko, on the contrary, was happy; the abbot would like Zbishko, of course, and would not oppress them at the accounting. He was so overjoyed at the thought that he decided to join Zbishko.

"Order some hay for my wagon," he said to Zbishko. "With the splinter of iron between my ribs, I drove from Krakow to Bogdanetz, and I will surely be able to reach Zgojhelitzi without the iron."

"I fear you might get worse," remarked Yagenka.

"Nothing will happen to me, for I feel that I am strong. And if I do suffer a relapse, the abbot will note that I hastened to meet him, and will be more indulgent."

"I would not exchange your health for his favors," Zbishko protested; but Matzko was stubborn, and insisted on going. He moaned somewhat on the road, but did not cease to instruct Zbishko how to conduct himself at Zgojhelitzi, particularly to submit and not to quarrel with their powerful relative, who was disinclined to brook resistance.

Zych and the abbot were sitting on a little mound near the dwelling, admiring the fine weather and drinking wine. Behind them, near the wall, sat six men of the abbot's suite, among whom was a pilgrim, who could be recognized by his hooked staff and the shells sewed on his garments. The others, shaved crowns, resembled people of holy orders, but were attired in civil clothes, with leather belts and dirks hanging on their sides.

Zych sprang to his feet when he saw Zbishko, but the abbot, conscious of his dignity, remained sitting and talking to the ecclesiastics, who swarmed through the door of the house.

Matzko, supported by Zych and Zbishko, approached the mound.

"I am still sick," said Matzko, kissing the hand of the abbot, "but yet I came to pay my respects to my benefactor; to thank you for the settlers of Bogdanetz, and to ask your blessing."

"I heard that you were improving," said the abbot, "and that you had made a vow to visit the tomb of our deceased queen."

"I did not know what saint to invoke, so I turned to her."

"And you did well!" shouted the abbot in anger. "She is better than a good many others, and let no one dare envy her!"

And in a moment the face of the abbot flashed with rage; his cheeks became red; his eyes sparkled. These fits of passion were familiar; therefore Zych burst out laughing, and exclaimed:

"Down with him who dares to envy her!"

The abbot drew a long breath, glanced all around him, then himself fell to laughing, with the same suddenness that he but a few moments ago had begun to boil with anger. At length, noticing Zbishko, he asked:

"And that is your nephew, and my relative?"

Zbishko bowed and kissed his hand.

"When I saw him he was little, and would not recognize him now," said the abbot. "Now, let me look at you!"

With penetrating eye, he examined Zbishko from head to foot, and after a little while said:

"He is too handsome! He is more like a lady than a knight."

"This lady was invited by the Germans to dance," answered Matzko, "and whoever danced with her made summersaults and never rose again."

"He can bend a bow without a cord," suddenly interposed Yagenka.

The abbot turned to her.

"What brought you here?"

Yagenka blushed to her ears, and, much confused, she answered:

"I saw him do it myself."

"See that you do not get shot on the wing; if you do, you will remember it a long time."

The pilgrims and ecclesiastics burst out in a chorus of laughter, while Yagenka, her cheeks suffused with blushes, became so confused that the abbot took pity on her. He raised his hand, and, showing the wide sleeve of his garment, said:

"Hide yourself here, else the blood will spurt from your flushed cheeks."

Meantime, Zych seated Matzko on a bench, and ordered wine to be brought. Yagenka ran away for the wine. The abbot turned his eyes to Zbishko, and said:

"Enough of jesting! It was not to shame you that I compared you to a girl, but in jest, because of your beauty, which most girls would envy. I know that you are a famous fellow; have heard of all your adventures. Zych told me everything. You understand?"

He looked searchingly into the eyes of Zbishko, and in a moment continued:

"You have promised peacock crests; then seek them. To pursue the enemies of our race is praiseworthy, and pleases God. But if you have made any other vows, then know that I can release you from them, for I have the power."

"Ah!" said Zbishko, "when a man vows in his soul, before the Lord Jesus, what power can release him?"

Matzko was frightened, but the abbot was apparently in a good mood, for instead of getting into a flurry, he playfully threatened Zbishko with his finger, and said:

"What a wise fellow! Look to, or the same thing might happen to you that happened to the German, Belgard."

"What happened to him?" asked Zych.

"He was burned on a pyre."

"For what?"

"He foolishly held that a layman can comprehend the divine mysteries as well as an ecclesiastic."

"It was a severe punishment."

"But a just one!" thundered the abbot. "He scoffed at the Holy Ghost. What think you? Can a layman come to any logical conclusion regarding the divine mysteries?"

"No, he cannot!" chimed in unison the wandering ecclesiastics.

"You commoners hold your peace!" commanded the abbot. "You are not clerics, though your crowns are shaved."

"We are no more commoners, but noblemen of your grace," answered one of the clerics, looking into the wine vessel, from which the odor of malt and hops floated in the air.

"Listen! His voice sounds as if it came from a barrel!" exclaimed the abbot. "Why do you look into that vessel? You will find no Latin there at the bottom."

"I am not looking for Latin, but for beer, and I cannot find any."

The abbot turned to Zbishko, who was gazing in wonder at these "noblemen," and said:

"These are clerici scholares, although they would gladly throw away their books, take up lutes and wander through the world. I am sheltering and feeding them. They are do-nothings, and a worthless lot; but they can sing, and have picked up a little of the vitriol of divine service; hence they are useful in church, and, in case of necessity, for defence; for some of them are brave fellows. That pilgrim there says that he has visited the Holy Land; but it would be vain to question him about the country or its waters. He does not even know the name of the Greek Emperor, nor in what city he lives."

"I knew once," said the pilgrim, in a hoarse voice, "but the fever which I contracted on the Danube shook it all out of me."

"I marvel at their swords," said Zbishko. "I never saw such swords on clerics."

"They are allowed to wear them," answered the abbot, "as they are not ordained. It need not surprise you that I, too, wear a dirk at my side. Last year I challenged Wolk of Bjhosow in a matter pertaining to those words which you passed on your way to Bogdanetz. But he did not accept the challenge."

"How could he enter a combat with a man belonging to the clergy?" interrupted Zych.

The abbot fumed, struck the table with his fist and shouted:

"When I am armed I am not a priest, but a gentleman! He failed to accept my challenge because he preferred to attack

me in the night, at Tultcha, with his people. That is why I armed my men." Here he rattled off a string of Latin, the meaning of which was that all laws give way to a man of courage and strength when he finds himself attacked.

Hearing the abbot's sonorous Latin, Zych, Matzko and Zbishko became silent, and bowed their heads before the wisdom of their learned relative, although they understood not a word.

The abbot again cast his angry eyes around, and added:

"Who knows but Wolk may attack me even here?"

"Let him attack!" shouted the wandering clerics, grasping the hilts of their swords.

"I wish he would! I am sick of this tranquility."

"He will not do it," said Zych, "but will more likely come peacefully and respectfully. He has already disclaimed Borow, and is only looking to the interest of his son. You know why—the devil take him!"

The abbot calmed down and answered:

"I saw young Wolk going with Pshetzlas from Rogow to the Kshesna inn. They did not recognize me, because it was dark, and only spoke of Yagenka." And, turning to Zbishko, he added: "And of you."

"What would they have of me?"

"Nothing. Only it is not to their liking that there is a third one near Zgojhelitzi. So Wolk says to Pshetzlas: 'After I have given him a thrashing, he will not longer be a beauty.' And Pshetzlas answered: 'He is not afraid of us. If he is not, then we will break his bones in a moment.' Then they began to assure each other that you would be afraid to meet them."

At these words Zych and Matzko exchanged glances, and slyly and with pleasure winked at each other. They were not certain whether the abbot had really heard such conversation, or said it merely to provoke Zbishko; but they understood that there was no better method of bringing Zbishko closer to Yagenka.

And the abbot added, as if purposely:

"I must admit that they are strong fellows."

Zbishko appeared to be indifferent, but in a strange voice began to ask Zych: "To-morrow is Sunday—is it not?"

"Yes."

"Shall we go to mass?"

"We will go."

"Whither? To Kshesna?"

"Of course, as Kshesna is nearer."

"All right!"



## CHAPTER X.

Zbishko overtook Zych and Yagenka, who were accompanying the abbot to Kshesna, and joined them. He wished to prove to the abbot that he feared neither Wolk nor Pshetzlas, and did not intend to hide himself from them. At first he was struck with the beauty of Yagenka. Although he had seen her in holiday attire when she visited Bogdanetz, or was receiving guests at Zgojhelitzi, she was never so attractively dressed as on this occasion. She wore a dress of red cloth, trimmed with ermine, red gloves and a gold embroidered cap, from under which two braids fell on her shoulders. She sat on the horse, not man-fashion, but on a high saddle, a stool under her feet, which could barely be seen under the long skirt with red ruffles. At home Zych permitted the girl to wear a peasant's coat and coarse leather shoes, but demanded that in church everybody should see that she was not the daughter of some petty nobleman or scartabell,\* but a maiden of a race of rich knights. Behind them rode four servants, followed by the clerics, with dirks and lutes hanging from their belts.

Zbishko was admiring the procession, especially Yagenka and the abbot, who, in his purple cloak, with wide sleeves, looked like a traveling prince. Zych was the most modestly dressed of all. He was solicitous about the pomp and elegance of others, but he himself was content with song and merriment.

The abbot, Yagenka, Zych and Zbishko rode side by side. The abbot first commanded his retainers to sing spiritual songs, but was soon seated, and began to converse with Zbishko, who smilingly examined the abbot's huge dirk, which was of the size of a heavy German sword.

"I see," said the abbot gravely, "that my sword astonishes you, but know that the synods permit the clergy the use not only of swords, but catapults. Finally, if our holy father, the Pope, prohibited the wearing of purple and the bearing of arms by the clergy, he surely meant it to apply to people of low origin, for the true nobleman was created by God to bear arms, and whoever attempted to deprive him of them would be opposing His eternal will."

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\*A townsman or peasant, ennobled for bravery in war. Sebastian Petricius derives the word from the Latin, *ex charta bellicum*.

"Henryk, Prince of Mazovia, even went into the arena," remarked Zbishko.

"He deserves condemnation, not for going into the arena," answered the abbot, raising his finger above his head, "but for contracting a low marriage, and therefore an unhappy one."

He stopped his horse and began to enforce his argument against an improper marriage by a plentiful sprinkling of Latin phrases, which he uttered with learned pomposity.

"Whoever wishes to marry," he declared, "must see that the lady of his choice is of good morals, pious, a good housewife, and scrupulously neat, all of which was said, besides the fathers of the church, by a certain wise heathen, Seneca by name. And how can you be assured that you have chosen the right woman if you are not familiar with the nest from which you choose your life partner? Another wise man, but of our own holy faith, said: 'A good ox gives a good hide—like mother, like child.' From these instructions, learn, sinful man, that a wife must not be sought in foreign lands, but at home; for if you take a virago, you will have cause to weep, even as wept a certain philosopher, on whose head a turbulent woman, in a fit of passion, once poured a vessel of *aquam sordidam*."

"In secula seculorum, amen!" thundered in chorus the clerics, who always gave a similar answer, without the slightest regard to its pertinence.

The others, absorbed in the abbot's discourse, amazed at his eloquence and knowledge of holy writ. It seemed that his instructions were not for Zbishko only; his discourse was directed chiefly to Zych and Yagenka, as if it were these latter whom he wished to direct on the road of truth. Yagenka, however, understood the import of the abbot's discourse, for she looked attentively from under her long eyelashes at Zbishko, who knit his brows and seemed to be absorbed in contemplation of the words uttered.

They soon proceeded on their journey, but were silent, and when they were within sight of Kshena the abbot turned his belt so that he could easily lay hold of the hilt of his sword, and said:

"The old Wolk of Bjhosow will probably come with a large suite."

"Surely," answered Zych. "However, I heard that he was taken ill."

"And my cleric was informed that he intended to attack us at the inn after mass."

"He would not do that without first sending word, especially after mass."

"May God bring him to his reason! I do not seek to quarrel with anyone, and I bear patiently with people."

Here the abbot looked at his retainers, and added:

"Do not unsheath your swords, and remember that we are servants of God! But if they should attack us cut them down!"

Zbishko rode alongside of Yagenka and conversed with her on the subject that most absorbed him.

"We will surely meet Wolk and Pshetzlas in Kshesna," he said. "Point them out to me from a distance."

"Very well, Zbishko," answered Yagenka.

"They meet you, of course, before and after mass. What do they do then?"

"They show me such favors as they think proper."

"They will show you no favors to-day; you understand?"

Again she meekly answered:

"Very well, Zbishko."

Their conversation was interrupted by the clatter of wooden mallets. Kshesna possessed no bell yet.

From the crowd waiting at the entrance to the church, Wolk and Pshetzlas immediately stepped forth. But Zbishko, anticipating their move, sprang from his horse before they reached her, helped Yagenka to alight, took her arm, and, challengingly looking at them, escorted her to the church.

In the vestibule a new disappointment was in store for Wolk and Pshetzlas. Both of them hastened to the baptismal font and, immersing their hands, held them out to Yagenka. But Zbishko did the same thing. Yagenka touched his fingers, and together they entered the church.

Then Wolk, as well as Pshetzlas, who was rather dull-witted, understood that it was a preconceived arrangement, and became possessed of such wild rage that their hair stood on end under their caps. They could restrain themselves only so far as, fearing chastisement from God, not to enter the church while enraged. Wolk sprang from the vestibule, and, like a maniac, ran across the cemetery, without knowing whither he was running. Pshetzlas followed him, understanding no more than the other what he was doing.

They halted only at the fence, where were heaped large stones, intended for a belfry. Wolk, wishing to calm the anger that was choking him, seized one of the stones and began to drag it. Pshetzlas followed his example, and the two, in great rage, carried the stones to the church door.

People looked at them in surprise, and thought that the young men were fulfilling some vow, and wished to help building the belfry. The exertion relieved them considerably, so

that they almost regained themselves, stopping and looking inquiringly at each other.

Pshetzlas of Rogow was the first to break the silence.

"Well?" he asked. "Shall we attack him now?"

"How can you attack him in the church?"

"Not in the church, but after mass."

"He arrived with Zych and the abbot. Do you not remember what Zych said? If a fight should occur, he will drive us out of Zgojhelitzi. Were it not for that I should have broken your ribs ere this."

"Or I yours!" answered Pshetzlas, clenching his powerful fists.

His eyes flashed with a sinister fire, but he considered that now, more than ever, was it necessary for him to be on good terms with Wolk. They had fought each other often enough, but after each fight had become reconciled, for their love of Yagenka did not estrange them from each other; they could not live in separation. Now there appeared a common foe, and a very dangerous one, apparently.

After a moment's silence, Pshetzlas asked:

"What is to be done? Shall we send him a challenge to Bogdanetz?"

Wolk was the wiser of the two, but even he did not know what to do. Luckily the clatter of the mallets was heard again. The divine service was over. Wolk took advantage of the situation, and said:

"What is to be done? Go into the church and await developments."

Pshetzlas of Rogow was delighted with the wise answer.

"Maybe the Lord Jesus will direct us," he said.

"And also bless us," added Wolk.

The mass gave them courage. They did not lose their heads even when Yagenka, at the close of the service, again took the holy water from the hands of Zbishko. In the cemetery, near the church door, Pshetzlas and Wolk made a low bow to Zych, Yagenka, and even to the abbot, although the latter was old Wolk's enemy. They looked frowningly at Zbishko, but dared not do anything, although their hearts ached with pain, rage and jealousy, for Yagenka never looked so charming and so much like a king's daughter. And when the abbot, with his fellow-travelers, turned on their way home, when the joyful song of the clerics reached their ears, Pshetzlas began to wipe the perspiration from his cheeks, covered with a heavy growth of hair, and sniffed like a horse, and Wolk gnashed his teeth, and said:

"To the inn! Woe is me!"

Then, recalling the remedy that calmed his anger, he again grasped a stone, and in his rage carried it to its former place.

And Zbishko rode alongside of Yagenka, and listened to the song of the abbot's retainers, and when they were some distance away he suddenly stopped his horse and said:

"I should have ordered mass said for the health of uncle, but have entirely forgotten it. I must return."

"It is not necessary!" exclaimed Yagenka. "We will send from Zgojhelitzl."

"No, I will go, and do not wait for me. Good day!"

"Good day!" said the abbot. "Go!"

His face brightened up, and when Zbishko disappeared from view, he quietly poked Zych with his elbow, and said:

"Do you understand?"

"Understand what?"

"That he will get into a fight with Wolk and Pshetzlas as surely as amen follows a prayer. But that is what I desired. I have purposely arranged things to that end."

"They are strong fellows. He is liable to be worsted; and what good will it do?"

"What good? If they fight over Yagenka, how will he be able to think of the daughter of Yurand? Yagenka will then be his lady, and not she. And that is what I wish, for he is my relative, and I like him."

"And what about his vow?"

"I will release him from that vow. Do you not know that I promised it?"

"You are wise enough to meet any emergency," answered Zych.

This praise flattered the abbot. He caught up with Yagenka and asked:

"Why are you so gloomy?"

Yagenka turned on her saddle, caught the hand of the abbot and raised it to her lips.

"Holy father, will you not send two of your men to Kshesna?"

"They will only get drunk in the inn."

"They may prevent a quarrel."

The abbot searchingly looked in her eyes, and suddenly said in a harsh voice:

"And what if they do kill him?"

"Then let them kill me, too!" exclaimed Yagenka.

And all the grief that had accumulated in her breast from the moment she first beheld Zbishko was now precipitated in a

flood of tears, seeing which, the abbot embraced her, almost covering her with his wide sleeve, and said:

"Do not fear, daughter. They may quarrel, but they are also noblemen, and will not treacherously attack him. They may challenge him, as is the custom with knights, but Zbishko will be able to handle even both. And as to Yurand's daughter—you have heard of her—I will tell you one thing: the tree is not growing yet that will furnish the wood for their bridal couch."

"If he loves her, then it is all the same to me," she said through her tears.

"Then why do you whimper?"

"Because I fear for his safety."

"There is a woman's reason!" said the abbot, and burst out laughing. Then, leaning over close to Yagenka's ear, he said:

"You must consider that even if he married you, he would still be fighting; he is a nobleman, you know."

And, leaning still closer, he added:

"And that he will marry you, and soon, is as true as God exists!"

"Why should he marry me!" answered Yagenka, smiling through her tears and looking at the abbot, as if wishing to ask him how he knew it all.

Meantime Zbishko, on his return to Kshesna, first went to the priest and ordered mass to be said; then went direct to the inn, where he hoped to find the young Wolk and Pshetzlas.

In the inn he found both Wolk and Pshetzlas and a great many other people—noblemen and scartabells, peasants and a few jugglers, who were giving an exhibition of German sleight-of-hand. At first he could not distinguish anybody, because the windows, covered with bovine bladder, permitted little light to enter the room, but when a few dry branches were thrown into the fire he noticed the wrathful, excited face of Wolk and the shaggy Pshetzlas sitting beside a wooden jug of beer.

Zbishko slowly approached them, elbowing his way through the crowd, and when near them, struck the table with his hand, so that it resounded throughout the room.

Pshetzlas and Wolk hurriedly rose from their seats, and began to straighten their belts, but before they could lay their hands on the hilts of their swords Zbishko threw a glove on the table and uttered, with that nasal twang usually assumed by knights when making a challenge, the following unexpected words:

"If either of you two, or any other knight in this room, will deny that Lady Danusia, the daughter of Yurand of Spichow,

is the most charming and virtuous maiden in the whole world, then I challenge him to single combat, on horse or on foot, the combat to last until the first fall or the last breath!"

Wolk and Pshetzlas were no less amazed than the abbot would be on hearing that challenge, and for a moment could think of no answer. Who was that lady? They were concerned about Yagenka, and not about her; and if that crazy man was not interested in Yagenka, what would he of them? Why did he come to provoke them? Their thoughts were in such confusion that they stood with wide open mouths, and Pshetzlas also stared at him, as if he were a freak.

The more sensible Wolk, somewhat familiar with knightly customs, knew that a knight might make a vow to one lady and marry another. He therefore considered it possible that that might be the case with Zbishko; and seeing that there was an opportunity to take the part of Yagenka, he determined to take advantage of it immediately.

Stepping from behind the table, with threatening mien, he approached Zbishko and asked:

"What, you son of a dog! Then it is not Yagenka who is the most charming?"

Then Pshetzlas stepped forth. The guests of the inn formed a circle around the dramatis personae, for they all knew that a very pretty quarrel was impending, and one not likely to end in a fizzle.

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## CHAPTER XI. YAGENKA

On returning home, Yagenka immediately sent a servant to the Kshesna inn to find out if a fight had taken place there, or if any one had been challenged to combat; but the servant, receiving a coin on the way, got drunk and did not think of returning. Another servant, sent to Bogdanetz with the news of the Abbott's arrival, returned and said that he had seen Zbishko playing dice with the old knight.

Yagenka was partially calmed. Knowing how experienced and adroit Zbisko was, she feared a challenge less than some unexpected rencontre in the inn. She wished to go to Bogdanetz with the abbot, but the latter had to speak to Matzko of the pledge, and of another more important matter, and did not wish to be a witness to the conversation. Besides, he intended to stay there over night.

On hearing of the safe arrival of Zbishko, the abbot's spirits rose high, and he commanded his clerics to sing, which they

did so loudly that the entire forest trembled, and the peasants of Bogdanetz rushed from their huts, thinking there was a conflagration, or that an enemy had attacked the town. But the pilgrim riding in the van assured them that the melodious strains merely indicated that a great church dignitary had come to town. The peasants bowed, and even made the sign of the cross; while the Abbot, seeing with what respect he was greeted, and the deference shown him, overflowed with glad-some pride, felt at peace with the entire wrold, and was well disposed to all men.

Matzko and Zbishko, hearing the shouts and singing, went to meet the guest at the gate.

Some of the clerics had been in Bogdanetz before, but there were also several who had but lately joined the company, and were in Bogdanetz for the first time. These were chagrined at the sight of that miserable house, which was not to be compared with the Zgojhelitzl domicile. But the chimney was smoking, and in the room the odor of saffron and various viands filled the room. Leaden dishes were arranged on two tables, which dishes were empty yet, it is true, but were of such size that their hearts jumped at the sight of them. On the smaller table stood a silver dish, and a goblet of the same metal, wonderfully wrought, intended for the abbot. Both of these had been obtained in the war with the Frisians.

The guests were invited to the tables, but the abbot, who had eaten heartily before his departure, refused to partake of the food, the more so since he had come here on a more important mission. From the moment of his arrival he scrutinized Zbishko, hoping to see traces of a fight, but beholding the calm expression on the young man's face his agitation grew until he could contain himself no longer.

"Let us go to the side-chamber," he said. "I wish to talk to you about the pledge. Do not argue with me, or I shall get angry!"

He turned to the clerics and thundered:

"Be quiet here, and do not spy under the door!"

He opened the door of the closet, which was very small, Matzko and Zbishko following him. They all seated themselves on trunks. The abbot turned to the young knight:

"You returned to Kshesna when you left us?"

"I did."

"What did you do?"

"Prayed for the health of uncle, and nothing else."

"H'm! Zbishko met neither Wolk nor Pshetzlas," he mused. "Perhaps he never looked for them. I have been mistaken,"



He was angry because of his mistake, and because he had miscalculated. His cheeks became red, his breathing quickened.

"Let us talk of the pledge," he said after a little while. "Have you the money? If not, then Bogdanetz is mine!"

Matzko knew how to treat with him. He silently rose, raised the lid of the trunk he was sitting on, took out a bag of money, apparently prepared in advance, and said:

"We are poor people, but we are ready with the money, and what we owe we pay, as it is stated in the written agreement, and which I have validated with the sign of the Holy Cross. If you should demand extra payment for superintending and for the good condition of the estate, we shall pay as you command, and we will fall at the feet of our benefactor."

He bowed to the knees of the abbot, as did also Zbishko. The abbot, who had expected them to argue and haggle, was baffled by these tactics, and was even displeased, because while bargaining he meant to state his conditions, and now the opportunity was gone.

And returning the written agreement, which Matzko had made valid by the sign of a cross, he said:

"Why do you speak to me of extra payment?"

"Because I do not wish to take anything gratuitously," Matzko answered slyly, knowing that the more insistent he was in this case the easier the terms he would obtain. In a moment the abbot was in a rage.

"Is that it! You would not take anything from a relative without compensation! You would be under no obligation to another! You gave me no waste land, and I return it in no better condition, and if I take a notion to throw it away, I will do it!"

"You will not do it!" exclaimed Matzko.

"I will not? There is your pledge! There is your money! It is my will, and if I take a notion I will throw this money in the street. Yes, I will do it!"

He seized the bag of money and threw it on the floor with such force that the bag burst, and the silver coins rolled out on the ground.

"May God reward you! May God reward you, father and benefactor!" repeated Matzko, who had been waiting for this opportunity. "I would not take it from another, but I will not refuse a relative and a man of the clergy."

The abbot looked sternly at Matzko, now at Zbishko, and then said:

"Even when I am wrathful, I know what I am about. Keep

what I gave you, for I tell you beforehand that you shall not receive from me another farthing."

"We did not expect even this."

"And know that Yagenka, at my death, will inherit everything I have."

"The land also?" Matzko asked, naively.

"The land also!" thundered the abbot.

Matzko's face lengthened, but he restrained himself, and said:

"Why should you think of death? May God grant you life for a hundred years, or even more, and a good bishopric."

"And why not? Am I worse than others?" asked the abbot.

"Not worse, but better."

These words had a pacifying effect on the abbot. Generally his anger was short-lived.

"Well," said he, "you are my kin, while she is my godchild, but I love her and Zych. There is no better man in the world than Zych, nor a better girl than Yagenka. Who can say anything against them?"

He cast a challenging glance around him, but not only did Matzko not contradict him, but hastened to affirm that no better neighbor was to be found in the entire kingdom.

"And as to Yagenka," he said, "I could not love my own daughter more than I love her. I owe my recovery to her, and while I live I will not forget her."

"You will be accursed, you and your nephew, if you forget her," said the abbot, "and I will be the first to curse you. I do not wish to be unfair with you, because you are my kin. I have devised a method by which all my property, upon my death, should pass over to Yagenka and yourselves. Do you understand?"

"God grant that it may so happen!" said Matzko. "My God! I would travel on foot from the tomb of the Queen to Calvary to kneel before the Cross!"

The abbot was pleased with the sincerity with which Matzko spoke. He smiled and said:

"The girl has the right to be capricious; she is good looking, has a large marriage portion, and comes of good stock. How can a Pshetzlas or a Wolk suit her, when she is fit to be the mate of the Governor's son! Were I seeking a match for her I would choose a man worthy of her. She knows that I love her, and wish her supreme happiness."

"He will be a lucky man, indeed, whom you will choose for her," said Matzko.

But the abbot turned to Zblishko.

"Well, what do you think?"

"I think the same as my uncle."

The kind face of the abbot brightened even more. He struck Zbishko on the shoulder blade, so that it echoed through the closet, and said:

"Why did you prevent Wolk and Pshetzlas from meeting Yagenka in church?"

"That they might not think that I feared them, and that you might not think that they inspire me with terror."

"You also handed her holy water?"

"Yes."

The abbot struck him again.

"Well—take her, if that is the case!"

"Take her!" echoed Matzko.

Zbishko brushed back the hair from his forehead and calmly answered:

"How can I take her, since I made a vow, at Tinetz, to Danusia, the daughter of Yurand?"

"You have vowed to bring her some jewels, crests from German helmets, so look for them, but take Yagenka now."

"No," answered Zbishko. "Later I swore to wed her."

The abbot's face began to redden from the rush of blood; his ears became blue, while his eyes seemed to be coming out of their sockets. He approached Zbishko and said, with suppressed wrath:

"Your words are chaff, and I am the wind; do you understand?"

And he blew with such force that the cap fell from Zbishko's head, and his hair fell disheveled on his shoulders. Zbishko lowered his eyebrows, and, looking straight in the abbot's eyes, said:

"My honor rests upon my promise, and I can guard my honor."

Unaccustomed to resistance, the abbot was so confused that he could not utter a word. Then came an oppressive silence, which Matzko finally interrupted.

"Zbishko!" he shouted, "are you mad?"

"I know what the trouble is with him; his soul is not that of a knight, or a nobleman, but of a hare. Yes, that is it! He is afraid of Pshetzlas and Wolk."

Zbishko, who retained his composure, shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference, and answered:

"Why, I have already split their heads at Kshesna!"

"God be with you! Is it possible?"

The abbot looked at Zbishko with distended eyes. Wrath

struggled with wonder within him, but his quick intelligence suggested to him that he might not profit by Zbishko's victory over Pshetzlas and Wolk. At last, having calmed down, he shouted at Zbishko:

"Why did you not tell us?"

"Because I was ashamed. I thought that, as becomes knights, they would challenge me to single combat, but I found, instead, that they were highwaymen. Wolk tore a board from the table, and Pshetzlas another, and thus both attacked me. What was I to do? I seized a bench and—you understand the rest."

"Are they alive?" inquired Matzko.

"They are alive; I only stunned them. They had begun to breathe even before I left."

The abbot listened, rubbed his forehead, then suddenly sprang from the trunk on which he had again seated himself to bring his thoughts in order, and shouted:

"Stay! I will tell you something."

"What will you tell me?" asked Zbishko.

"I will tell you that from the moment you fought for Yagenka and split the heads of two good men you became her knight, and not any other lady's, and you must wed her."

He stood with arms akimbo, and triumphantly glanced at Zbishko, who smiled and said:

"Oh, I well knew why you set me on them, but you were not successful at all."

"How so? Speak!"

"I challenged them to force them to admit that Danusia, the daughter of Yurand, was the most beautiful and virtuous maiden in the world, and they insisted that Yagenka was; hence the fight."

On hearing this the abbot stood like one petrified, and but for the movement of his eyelashes he was apparently lifeless. But suddenly he turned, kicked open the door of the closet, ran into the room, seized a weapon from the hands of one of the pilgrims, and began to belabor his retainers with it, roaring like a wounded bull:

"To your horses, you clowns! To your horses, you apostates! My foot shall not again cross the threshold of this house! To your horses! To your horses!"

And jostling open the entrance door, he rushed into the courtyard, followed by the frightened clerics.

In vain Matzko ran after the abbot, imploring him to remain, and calling God to witness that it was not his fault; nothing availed. The abbot swore, cursed the house, the people, the horse; and when his horse was brought he vaulted

upon it, without putting his foot into the stirrup, and galloped away, his sleeves fluttering in the wind making him appear like a gigantic red bird.

Matzko watched them until they disappeared in the woods; then returned home, and said to Zbishko, shaking his head:

"See what you have done!"

"It would not have happened if I had left Bogdanetz before he came, and if I remained here it was for your sake."

"How so?"

"I did not wish to leave you while you were sick."

"What will be the result?"

"I will go away."

"Whither will you go?"

"To Danusia, in Mazovia. I will also look for peacock crests among the Germans."

Matzko was silent for a moment, then said:

"The written agreement he returned, but the security is there, and is properly entered in the records. Now we will have to pay the full amount."

"Then we will pay it. You have the money, and I do not need any on the road. I will be received everywhere, and my horses will be fed. I only need a cuirass on my breast and a dirk at my side; the rest does not trouble me."

Matzko began to reflect, and weigh all that had happened. Everything had gone contrary to his desires and his hopes.

In the depth of his heart he sincerely desired that Zbishko would marry Yagenka, but he knew that it was a vain hope. The abbot was wrathful; Wolk and Pshetzlas had got into a fight with Zbishko; it were better for him to depart than remain here and cause further quarrels and discord.

"Well," said he, finally, "you must look for peacock crests in either case, and, as you desire it—go. May the will of God prevail! I must forthwith hasten to Zgojhelitzi. Perhaps I will somehow pacify the abbot and Zych. I am especially sorry for Zych."

He looked at Zbishko, and suddenly asked:

"Are you not sorry for Yagenka?"

"May God grant her health and prosperity!" answered Zbishko.

## BOOK THREE.

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### CHAPTER I.

Matzko patiently waited several days, in the hope of receiving information from Zgojhelitzi of the abbot's reconciliation. Weariness finally overcame him, and he decided to visit Zych. It could not be said that anything that had happened was attributable to any act of his, yet he desired to know whether Zych was not offended at him also. As to the abbot, he was convinced that from that moment his anger would hang over himself and Zbishko alike.

However, he desired to do everything in his power to pacify the abbot; hence, as he was making his way to Zgojhelitzi, he was considering his best course, in order to soften the effect of the unfortunate occurrence and to retain the old friendship of his neighbor. But his thoughts were confused, and he was glad to find Yagenka alone. She greeted him with the customary bow, kissed his hand, but was somewhat sad.

"Is your father home?" asked Matzko.

"No; he went hunting with the abbot. They will return soon."

She invited him into the house; they seated themselves and remained silent for some time. The girl was the first to break the silence.

"Do you feel lonesome in Bogdanetz?"

"I do feel lonesome," answered Matzko. "You know that Zbishko has departed?"

Yagenka sighed.

"I know. I thought that he would call to bid us good-bye, at least, but he did not."

"How could he have called?" said Matzko. "The abbot would have torn him to pieces, and your father would not have welcomed him, either."

She shook her head and answered:

"I should not have permitted any one to hurt him." Although Matzko was hard-hearted, when he heard these words he drew Yagenka toward him and said:

"God bless you, girl! You are sad, but I feel no better, for neither the abbot nor your father loves you more than I do. I would rather I had died from that wound of which you cured me than that Zbishko should marry another girl."

Such sorrow and anguish passed over Yagenka that for a few moments she lost control over herself.

"I shall never see him," she said, "and if I again behold him he will be with the daughter of Yurand. It would be better for me to cry myself blind——." And she covered her tear-filled eyes with a corner of her apron.

"Calm yourself! He is gone, it is true, yet I have hope, with the aid of God, he will return, and without the daughter of Yurand," replied Zbishko.

"Why should he return without her?" she asked from under her apron.

"Because Yurand is not willing to have him marry his daughter."

Yagenka suddenly uncovered her face and, turning it to Matzko, she asked quickly:

"He told you that? Is it true?"

"It is true, I swear!"

"And why is he unwilling?"

"Who knows? He made a vow, I believe; a vow so solemn that it cannot be broken. Zbishko promised to help him avenge his wife, but even that did not avail. And even the fact that Princess Anna herself was the matchmaker led to no better result. Yurand would listen to no supplication, advice or command. He simply said that he could not. It is apparent, then, that he has sufficient cause for his refusal; it is certain that he is a man of firmness, who is determined to fulfill his promises. Be calm, and do not lose hope. Zbishko swore in church that he would go and bring those peacock crests, and to be just he had to go." The girl covered her head, as a sign that she wished to marry him, and that saved his life. Then, of course, he is under obligation to her. He belongs to her, but I have a presentiment that she will not be his. Zych is offended with him; the abbot will avenge himself on him in a way that will not soon be forgotten. I am vexed myself, but, upon thoroughly considering the matter, I do not see that Zbishko could have acted otherwise. Having sworn to do a thing, he was under obligation to do it—he is a nobleman, you know. But I tell you that, if the Germans do not give him a sound thrashing he will return, not only for my sake, or for the sake of Bogdanetz, but for your sake—for he likes to see you."

"Oh, no! He does not care to see me!" said Yagenka, at the same time moving closer to Matzko, and touching him with her elbow, she asked: "How do you know? It is not true that he cares for me."

"How do I know?" answered Matzko. "I saw how hard it was for him to depart. Besides, when it was finally determined that he should go, I asked him: 'Are you not sorry for Yagenka?' And he answered: 'May God grant her health and prosperity!' And he began to sigh so deeply that one would think he had a smith's bellows in his breast."

"It is not true!"

"By the Holy Cross, it is true! You may rest assured that, after seeing you, the other girl will no longer be to his tastes, for you know yourself that there is no more beautiful girl than you in the entire world. Fear not, he likes you even more than you like him."

"I can hardly believe that!" doubtfully exclaimed Yagenka. And again she hid her blushing face, while Matzko smiled, smoothed his mustache with his hand, and said:

"Ah! If I were young! But do not worry, for I can see even now what the result will be; he will go to Majovia and win his spurs at the court; it is near the frontier, where Crusaders are numerous. I know that there are many powerful knights among the Germans, but their hides are not proof against iron. Few can overcome Zbishko, for he is a violent fighter. You have heard how he handled both Pshetzlas and Wolk, although people said that they were the most renowned fighters, and as strong as bears. He will return with crests, but without Yurand's daughter, for I have spoken to Yurand, and know his mind. And then Zbishko will come here; what other place, indeed, could he got to?"

"Who knows when he will return!"

"Of course, if you cannot hold out no one will be offended. Meanwhile, repeat to the abbot and your father everything I have told you, that their anger against Zbishko may be somewhat allayed."

"How can I speak? Papa is more worried than angry, and it is not safe to mention Zbishko's name in the presence of the abbot. What a scolding he gave me and papa, for sending that servant with Zbishko!"

"What servant?"

"You know, there was a Czech here whom papa caught near Boleslas—a fine fellow and a faithful servant. His name is Glawa. Papa gave him to me as my servant, because he called himself the owner of Boleslas. I armed him well and



sent him to serve and guard Zbishko; and if anything should happen—which, God forbid—he is to bring me word. I also provided him with money, and he swore to me that he would serve Zbishko faithfully unto death.”

“You darling girl! God will reward you! And did not your father object?”

“Indeed, he made vigorous objection. At first he resisted, but I fell at his feet and he consented. It is easy to manage father, but when the abbot heard what I had done from his merry-andrews, he began to curse everybody, and made the day so black with his howling that father hid himself in the corn-crib. In the evening the abbot relaxed somewhat, and took pity on my tears, and gave me some beads. But I willingly suffered, provided Zbishko had a larger retinue.

“In faith, I know not whom I love best, you or him. But he had a large enough retinue, and I also offered him money, although he refused to take it. But Mazovia is not so far away——”

Their conversation was interrupted by the howling of dogs and trumpet sounds.

“Papa and the abbot are returning from the hunt. Let us go to the hill, for it would be better that the abbot see us first from a distance than suddenly come upon us.”

Saying which they came out and mounted an adjacent hill, from which place they saw a group of people, dogs, horses and some trophies of the hunt. The abbot, on noticing Matzko, threw his hunting-pole in his direction—not that he intended to hit Matzko, but merely to show his anger at the Bogdanetz folks. But Matzko, pretending not to see it, removed his cap, while Yagenka did not notice anything, because she was first of all staggered on seeing her two admirers.

“Pshetzlas and Wolk!” she exclaimed. “They have probably met papa in the woods.”

As to Matzko—at the sight of them, even his wound began to pain him. The thought flashed through his head that one of them might get Yagenka, and with her Mochidoli, the lands of the abbot, the forests, money. Sadness and wrath possessed him, the more so when such unusual things presented themselves before his eyes. Wolk, notwithstanding that his father had been but lately preparing to fight the abbot, now sprang forward to help the abbot dismount, while the latter leaned on the hand of the young squire in a very friendly manner.

“The abbot and old Wolk will become reconciled,” thought Matzko, “and with the girl he will give his forests and lands.”

But his sad thoughts were interrupted by Yagenka's voice, saying:

"So they have already recovered from the results of their fight with Zbishko. They may come here every day, if they like, but it will do them no good!"

Matzko looked at her. Her face became red, but remained calm, and her blue eyes flashed with anger, because she knew that they had brought on the fight and received the threshing on her account.

"Ah! You will do what the abbot tells you," said Matzko.

"The abbot will do what I wish!" she promptly answered.

"Lord!" thought Matzko. "And the foolish Zbishko scorns such a girl!"

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## CHAPTER II.

Meanwhile the "foolish Zbishko" had departed really with a heavy heart. At first he was disconcerted on finding himself without his uncle, who was theretofore his constant companion, and now he did not know how he would be able to do without him on his journey and in war. Besides, he pitied Yagenka, for he now felt how pleasant it was to be at her side, and how sad it was to be without her. And he wondered at the sadness it occasioned him, and even became uneasy. If his feeling toward Yagenka were merely that of a brother to a sister, it would not matter, but he noticed that it "oppressed" him, for he wished to take her in his arms, seat her on the horse, or help her dismount; he wished to carry her across streams, wring the water from her tresses, to roam with her in the woods and look at her and to consult with her. He was so accustomed to all these attentions, and it afforded him so much pleasure that he fell into deep contemplation, and entirely forgot that he was on a long journey to Mazovia, but recalled that moment when Yagenka had come to his aid in the forest. And it seemed to him that it was but yesterday, and the beaver hunt rose plainly in his vision. He did not see her swim for the beaver, but now it seemed to him that he saw her, and again he felt that "oppression." Then he recalled how she was attired in the church, and how he wondered that a pretty and simple girl appeared to him like a girl of distinguished birth, driving with her retinue. In view of all that a sadness mingled with pleasure took possession of him. And when he considered that he could have done what he pleased with her; how she was drawn to him; how

she looked in his eyes, and how she clasped him, he could hardly sit on his horse.

"If I had only met her before my departure, embraced her, and bidden her farewell," he said to himself, "I might feel easier." But he felt that it was not true, that he would not have felt any easier, because at the very thought of such leave-taking he became all afire, although the first frost of winter covered the ground.

He was finally frightened at these recollections, too much resembling passion, and he shook them from his mind as he would dry snowflakes from his clothes.

"I am going to my Danusia, to my darling!" he said to himself.

And he understood at once that it was a different feeling, more devout, as it were, which does not agitate one's blood. And gradually, as his feet grew cold and the keen wind cooled his blood, all his thoughts turned to Danusia. To her he really was indebted. But for her he would have died long ago. At the moment when she, in the presence of all the knights and the townspeople, said: "You are mine!" she had snatched him from the hands of the executioners, and from that moment he belonged to her as much as a slave belongs to his master. It was not he that had taken her, but she that had taken him; against that even the opposition of Yurand could not avail. Only she could banish him from her, as a mistress drives away her servant; though even in that case he should not go very far, as he was bound by his own vow. But she would not banish him, he thought, but would more likely leave the Mazovian court and go with him even to the end of the world. And he began to glorify her in his soul, blaming Yagenka, as if it were her fault that he was tormented by temptations, that his feelings were swayed by contrary emotions. It did not even enter his head now that Yagenka had cured Matzko, and that perhaps but for Yagenka that bear would have torn the scalp from his own head, and he was mentally angered with Yagenka, thinking thereby to deserve Danusia and justify himself in his own eyes.

At that moment Glawa, the Czech, the attendant sent by Yagenka, rode up to Zbishko, leading a horse with a pack-load on his back.

"Glory to the Father and the Son!" he said, bowing. Zbishko had seen him a couple of times at Zgojhelitzi, but did not recognize him now.

"Forevermore! Who are you?" he asked.

"Your servant, noble master."

"How my servant? Yonder are my servants," he said, pointing to the two Turks presented to him by Zavisha, and two strong fellows who were riding on horseback, each leading a knight's steed by the bridle. "Those are mine. Who sent you?"

"Lady Yagenka, the daughter of Zych of Zgojhelitzi."

"Lady Yagenka?"

Zbishko was still filled with indignation against her. He therefore said:

"Go home and thank the lady for her kindness. I do not need you."

But the Czech shook his head.

"I will not return, master. I was presented to you, and, besides I have sworn to serve you while I live."

"If you have been presented to me, then you are my servant!"

"Yes, yours, master."

"Then I command you to return!"

"I have sworn to be faithful to you, and though I am a prisoner of war and a poor man, I am a proprietor myself."

"Begone!" shouted Zbishko. "You would not serve me against my will? Begone, unless you wish me to send an arrow through your body."

The Czech calmly took an outer garment, lined with wolf fur, handed it to Zbishko, and said:

"Lady Yagenka also sent you this, master."

"You evidently wish to have your bones broken," said Zbishko, taking a spear from the hands of his servant.

"Besides, there is a purse, if you desire it," answered the Czech.

Zbishko aimed his spear, but he recollected that the Czech, though a prisoner of war, had come of the same class as he, and was, perhaps, a small land proprietor, who, apparently, had remained with Zych because he lacked the means with which to buy his liberty, and he lowered his spear.

The Czech bowed to his stirrup and said:

"Do not be angry, master. If you do not permit me to go with you I will follow you at some distance behind, but I will go, for I have sworn on my soul to do so."

"And if I order you to be killed or bound?"

"If you order your people to kill me, that would not be my sin, and if you order me bound, then I will wait till some good people come my way and unbind me, or wolves devour me."

Zbishko made no answer, but turned his horse and rode on, his retinue following him. The Czech, with a bow hung on his

back and an ax on his shoulder, straggled behind, wrapping himself in a tattered aurock's hide, for a piercing wind was blowing and snowflakes whirled in the air.

The snowstorm was growing in intensity. The Turks were freezing even in their fur coats; the servants were clapping their hands to keep them warm, and Zbishko, rather scantily dressed, looked time and again at the fur coat brought by the Czech, and finally ordered one of the Turks to hand it to him.

Having wrapped himself in it, he soon felt the warmth spreading through his body. Especially comfortable was the hood, which covered his ears and part of the face. He then involuntarily thought what a wise girl Yagenka was, and he slackened his pace, desiring to inquire of the Czech what was going on at Zgojhelitz. Looking keenly at him, he said:

"And he did not oppose it?"

"He does," answered Glawa.

"Does old Zych know that the lady sent you to me?"

"He did."

"Tell me what took place."

"The master paced the room, and the lady followed him. He shouted, while she did not say anything. But when he looked at her she fell at his feet, but said not a word. Finally he said: 'Are you deaf that you do not answer me? Speak, for I will commend your conduct in the end, and when I have commended it the abbot will break my head!' When the lady saw that she had gained her point she began to thank him with tears in her eyes. 'Swear that you will not run out secretly to bid him farewell, then I will allow you to send the man.' Then the lady became sad, but she swore as directed. He was then satisfied, for he and the abbot feared lest she might have a desire to see your grace. But that was not all. The lady wished to send two horses, and the master would not permit it; she wished to send the wolf's skin and the purse, and the master would not allow it. But what do these prohibitions amount to! If she took a notion to burn down the house the master would consent also. You see, here is the other horse, the wolf's skin and——"

"A wonderful girl!" thought Zbishko.

In a moment he asked loudly:

"And did the abbot make any trouble?"

The Czech smiled, like a wise servant who thoroughly understood what was taking place, and answered:

"Both did it secretly, but I know what happened when the abbot learned why I departed. An abbot is an abbot! He would sometimes shout at the lady, then he followed her with

his eyes, to see if he had offended her too much. I was present myself on one occasion when he shouted at her, then he opened a trunk and produced a chain, such as you could not find even in Krakow, and said to her: "There!" The abbot will be reconciled to her, for he loves her more than a father."

"That is true!"

"Just as true as there is a God."

Here they became silent. The wind did not abate, and the snow was still falling. Suddenly Zbishko stopped his horse, for from the forest came a plaintive voice, half drowned by the noise of the forest.

"Christians! Help a servant of God in distress!"

At the same time a man ran into the road: It was difficult to determine from his dress whether he belonged to the clergy or the laity. He stopped before Zbishko and cried:

"Whoever you may be, master, help a man in dire distress!"

"What has happened, and who are you?" asked the young knight.

"I am a servant of God, though I have not been ordained. My horse escaped this morning and carried away my panniers, and I am here unarmed, and night is approaching. It is dreadful to hear the wild beasts roaring. I shall perish here unless you save me."

"If you were to perish with my consent," said Zbishko, "I should be responsible for your sins; but how do I know that you are telling the truth, and that you are not one of the swindlers that swarm on this road?"

"You will know by the panniers, master. Any one would part with a purse full of ducats for their contents, but I will divide them with you if you assist me on my journey."

"You say that you are a servant of God, but you do not know that a man should be helped not for the sake of worldly gifts, but for the sake of heavenly ones. But how did you save your panniers if your horse escaped?"

"The wolves devoured the horse before I found it, and I carried the panniers to the roadside, where I waited for help." And he pointed to two panniers made of bast which lay under a pine tree.

Zbishko looked at the man with suspicion, his appearance and outlandish accent having made an unfavorable impression. However, Zbishko permitted him the use of the horse which the Czech led by the bridle for himself and his panniers, which turned out to be uncommonly light.

"May God multiply your victories, puissant knight!" said the stranger.

And then, seeing the youthful face of Zbishko, he added, in an undertone:

"And also the hair in your beard."

Presently he was riding alongside the Czech. They were silent for a while, for the wind was high, and a terrible din rose from the forest. But when the elements had subsided a little Zbishko overheard the following conversation:

"I do not deny that you were at Rome, but you look like a genuine swindler, and your breath is rank with beer fumes," said the Czech.

"Have a care; there is eternal damnation!" snarled the stranger. "You are speaking to a man who last Christmas ate hard-boiled eggs with the Holy Father. Do not speak to me of beer, because I am cold enough without it, unless it is of hot beer; but if you have a bottle of wine then let me take a sip or two, for which I will remit your sins of a whole month."

"You have not been ordained. I have heard you say so. How, then, can you remit sins?"

"True, I have not been ordained, but my head is shaved, and I have the authority. Besides, I carry indulgences and relics."

"In these panniers?" asked the Czech.

"Yes, in these panniers. If you saw all that I carry you would fall prostrate—not only you, but all the pines in this forest, and all the wild beasts."

But the Czech, who was a sagacious man, and had seen the world, looked suspiciously at the dispenser of indulgences, and said:

"And the wolves devoured your horse?"

"They did, because they are the kin of the devil, but they all burst their carcasses. One of these I saw with my own eyes. Give me some wine, if you have any; for I am very cold."

The Czech did not give him any wine, and they became silent. Then the relic merchant took a turn in questioning.

"Whither are you going?"

"We are going very far. But now we are going to Sieradz. Are you going with us?"

"I must go. I will rest to-night in some shed, and to-morrow this pious knight may give me a horse, and then I will proceed on my way."

"What country are you from?"

"From the Prussian countries; from Malborg."

Hearing which Zbishko made a motion to the stranger to approach.

"You are from Malborg?"

"I have been in the Holy Land, master, then in Constantinople, and in Rome, whence I returned, through France, to Malborg. From Malborg I went to Mazovia, with holy relics, which true Christians gladly buy to save their souls."

"Have you been at Plotzk or Warsaw?"

"Yes, I have been in both places. May God grant health to both princesses. Princess Alexandra is loved even by the German sovereigns, because she is very pious, although Princess Anna Danuta is loved no less."

"Have you seen the Warsaw court?"

"I met them at Tzechanow, not at Warsaw. As a servant of God, the princes received me very hospitably, and provided liberally for my journey. But I left them some relics, which will bring God's blessing on them."

Zbishko wished to inquire about Danusia, but he felt that it would be like speaking of his love to a stranger of low origin, and perhaps an impostor.

"What relics do you carry about?" he asked, after a short interval of silence.

"I carry indulgences and relics, which are distinguished from indulgences. I have some that remit sins forever, some for five hundred years, for three hundred, two hundred, and less; I have also cheaper ones, that poor people may purchase, and diminish the torment that awaits them in purgatory. I have indulgences for past sins and sins of the future; but do not think, master, that I keep the money I receive for them. A piece of black bread and a sip of water is all I want; the rest I take to Rome, to be laid by for another crusade. It is true, there are people going around the world, begging the last pennies from the poor, but who are impostors; their indulgences are spurious, as are their relics, their seals and certificates. And it is these whom the Holy Father is pursuing with his letters; but the Prior of Sieradz did me an injustice, because my seals are genuine. Look at the wax, master, and judge for yourself."

"And what prior is that?"

"Ah, master! I hope I am mistaken in my supposition that he is infected with the heretical teachings of Wycliffe. But, as your armor bearer told me, if you are going to Sieradz, then I prefer not to show myself to him, that I may not be led to commit the sin of offending the holy relics."



"You mean to say, in a word, that he treated you as an impostor?"

"If it was only myself that he so treated, master, I should forgive him out of love for my neighbor, as I did with another man; but he sinned against my holy wares, and I fear his soul is irrevocably doomed to perdition."

"What sort of holy wares are those?"

"It is not fit even to speak of them with covered head. For the nonce, and in view of the fact that I have ready indulgences, I permit you to keep your cap on, for a cold wind is blowing. You will buy a small indulgence, and the sin will not count against you. What a variety of things I have! There is a hoof of the ass, on which the flight was made to Egypt; it was found near the pyramids. The King of Aragon offered me for it fifty ducats of real gold. There is a feather from the wing of the Archangel Gabriel, which he lost on Annunciation day. I have also two of the quails that were sent down from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness; and some of the oil with which the heathen intended to anoint Saint John; and a rung of the ladder that Jacob dreamed of; and the tears of Mary; and a little rust from the keys of Saint Peter; but I cannot enumerate them all, for I am cold, and your armor-bearer, master, refused to give me some wine. Besides, I would not get through till evening.

"Great relics, if they are genuine!" said Zbishko.

"If they are genuine, master! Take the spear from your servant, and aim it, for the devil is near, and it is he who is suggesting such thoughts to you. Keep him at a spear's distance. And if you would not bring down misfortune on your head, then buy of me a remission of that sin, else within three weeks one whom you love more than anybody in the world will die."

Zbishko took fright at the threat, for he thought of Danusia, and answered:

"But it is not I who does not believe, but the Dominican prior."

"Look at the wax of these seals yourself; and as for the prior, God only knows if he is alive, for the judgment of God is swift."

At Sieradz they found that the prior was alive. Zbishko even visited him, to order mass said for the health of Matzko, and for his own success in the coming search for peacock crests. The prior, who was a foreigner, had lived forty years in Sieradz, and was an enemy of the Crusaders. On learning of Zbishko's undertaking, he said:

"Most of them will be punished by God; but I will not dissuade you from carrying out your intentions—first, because you have made a vow; and, secondly, because no punishment is great enough for all that they have done in Sieradz."

"What have they done?" asked Zbishko, who was glad to know the sins of the Crusaders.

The prior related how, when he was twelve years of age, the Crusaders, led by Vincent of Shamotura, had attacked Sieradz by night, put all the inhabitants to the sword, sparing neither women nor children, who were thrown into the fire. How by morning the city lay in ashes, and not a solitary inhabitant remained except himself, who had hidden himself on a beam to which the church bell was fastened. But God had punished them at Ploatz; and yet the Crusaders were still seeking to exterminate their people, and would probably continue to do so, until the hand of God had swept them from the face of the earth.

"It was at Ploatz that nearly all the men of my tribe perished," said Zbishko. "But I do not regret it, because God rewarded King Loketek with a great victory, and had slain twenty thousand Germans."

"You will live to see a greater war and greater victories," said the prior.

"Amen!" answer Zbishko.

Zbishko then questioned the prior about the relic merchant, and was told that there were many impostors traveling with forged documents, and that there were papal bulls in existence commanding the bishops to hand these impostors over to the bishop's courts. That the papers of this vagabond seemed suspicious, and the prior had ordered him to be taken before a court, but that he had fled. It may be that he merely feared difficulties on his travels, but his flight created even greater suspicion.

Finally, he invited Zbishko to stop at the monastery over night, but the latter could not accept the invitation, because he intended to hang out an announcement of "a challenge to combat, on horse or on foot," to all those knights who disagreed with him that Lady Danusia, the daughter of Yurand, was the most beautiful and virtuous maiden in the kingdom. But the gate of the monastery was not the proper place to hang out such challenges, and neither the prior nor the monks would consent to write such an announcement. Hence the young knight was worried. But, on returning to the inn, it occurred to him that it might be well to see the relic merchant.

"The prior does not know whether you are an impostor or not," said Zbishko. "He wondered why you should fear to appear at the Bishop's court, if your papers are authentic."

"I do not fear the bishop," answered Sauderus, "but the monks, who are not familiar with the seals. I really intended to go to Cracow, but I have no horse, and must wait till some one presents me with one. Meanwhile I will send a letter there, on which I will put my own seal."

"I thought that if you should show that you can write it would be evident that you are not a common man. But how will you send the letter?"

"By some traveler or some itinerant monk. Are there not people enough going to the tomb of the Queen?"

"And will you write an announcement for me?"

"I will write what you command me—properly and sensibly—even on a board."

"A board would be even more suitable," said the delighted Zbishko, "for that will not tear, and will be useful afterwards."

As soon as the servants obtained a smooth board, Sauderus commenced to write his composition. What he wrote, Zbishko did not know, for he could not read; but he immediately ordered the challenge nailed to the gate, and under it was suspended a shield, which the Turks took turns in guarding. Whoever struck that shield thereby accepted the challenge. But there seemed to be few lovers of such contests in Sieradz, for neither on that day, nor up to the following week, did the shield sound even once. In the afternoon the astonished youth made ready to depart. But before his departure Sauderus came to Zbishko and said:

"If master should hang that challenge in the German provinces, he would have no difficulty in meeting a knight."

"How so? The Crusaders, like monks, do not swear allegiance to ladies; it is forbidden them."

"I do not know whether they are forbidden or not, but I know that they have ladies. True, a Crusader cannot fight without provocation, for they make an oath to fight for the faith only; but, besides monks, there are many secular knights from foreign countries who come to aid the Germans. And these are always on the alert for an opportunity to fight, especially the French knights."

"Oho! I saw them at Wilno, and if it please God, I shall meet them at Malborg. I must have peacock plumes, for I have sworn to obtain them—do you understand?"

"Master, buy of me three beads of perspiration that fell

from the brow of Saint George when he wrestled with the dragon. There is no relic so useful to a knight. And you can give me for it the horse on which you allowed me to ride, and I will also give you an indulgence for the Christian blood you have shed in fight."

"Leave me, or I will get angry! I will not buy your wares until you prove their authenticity."

"Go, master, as you intended, to the Mazovian court, to Prince Yanoush. Ask there how many relics they have bought of me—the Princess herself, the knights and gentlemen, at the weddings which I had to attend."

"What weddings?" asked Zbishko.

"Those that usually take place before Advent. Knights without number were married, because they say that there will be war between the King of Poland and the German sovereigns over the Dobrzhinsk lands. Some say: 'God knows if I will survive the war,' and wish to taste marital happiness."

Zbishko's curiosity was aroused, not so much by the expected war as by the marriages said to have taken place.

"What maidens were wedded there?" he asked.

"Court princesses. I am not sure that even one remained unmarried, for the Princess said that she would have to look for new court maidens."

Zbishko was silent for a moment, then asked in a changed voice:

"And has Lady Danusia, the daughter of Yurand, whose name is on the board, also married?"

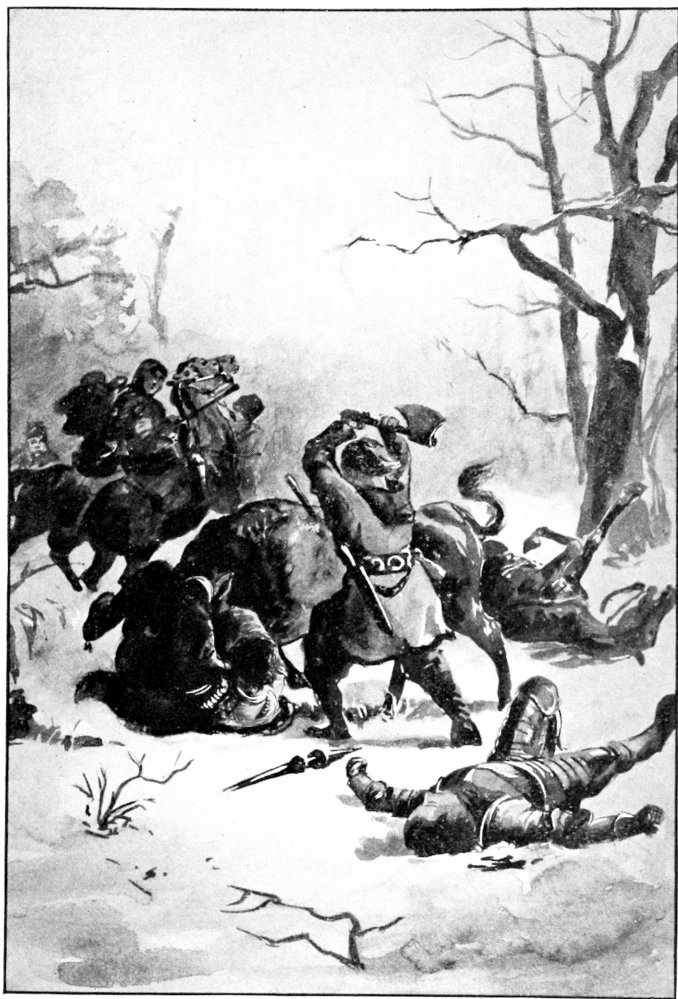
Sauderus did not reply immediately, because he was not certain of anything he said, and also because he could get better control of the knight if he kept him in doubt and could use him to better advantage. He had already decided in his soul that it would be profitable to retain the good will of this apparently rich knight. He had reason to hope that at his age the youth would be liberal, unwary, and would throw his money to the winds. At all events, he would be assured of shelter and food, which was of the greatest importance to him, and the opportunities of selling his relics would be greater.

He therefore knit his brow, raised his eyes, as though he was trying to recollect something, and answered:

"Lady Danusia, the daughter of Yurand—where does she hail from?"

"From Spichow, of course."

"I saw them all, but their names I can hardly recall."



"In a few leaps, the Czech reached the side of Zhishko, and struck with his axe across the back of the bull." See page 226.



"She is young yet—plays on the lute for the diversion of the Princess."

"Aha! Is young—plays on the lute. Young maidens were married also. Is she not of dark complexion, like agate?"

Zbishko gave a sigh of relief.

"No. She is as white as snow; her cheeks are red, and her hair flaxen."

"One there was, you see, dark as agate, who remained with the Princess; almost all the others were married."

"You say 'almost all.' Then they were not all married? For God's sake, if you wish to earn something, try to recollect!"

"I do. In three or four days I will be able to recall them to mind; and I should wish, best of all, a horse to carry my holy wares on."

"You will get it, if you tell me the truth." At that moment the Czech, who had been listening to the conversation, smiled and said:

"The truth will be known at the Mazovian court." Sauderus looked at him and said:

"Think you that I fear the Mazovian court?"

"I did not say that you fear them; I do say, however, that neither to-day, nor in three days, will you drive off with a horse. And if it should turn out that you have lied, then your bones will be broken."

"Certainly!" said Zbishko.

Sauderus thought that after such a threat it was best to be wary.

"If I wished to lie," he said, "I could have said at once either that she had married or that she had not married, but I said that I did not remember. If you possessed reason, my answer would have convinced you of my honor."

"My reason is not akin to your honor, because your honor can only be akin to that of a dog."

"My honor does not bark, while your reason does, and whoever barks in life will howl after death."

"True. And your honor will not howl after death, but will gnash its teeth, if you do not lose them in life while serving the devil."

And they began to quarrel. The Czech was quick at repartee, and for every word of the German he had two.

Meanwhile Zbishko was preparing for the road, and shortly they were on the way to Lenchitza. They soon reached a pine forest, which covered most of the country. A highway led through it, partly entrenched, and at low places paved with

round stone—a monument of the reign of King Kasimir. After the death of Kasimir, amid the confusion created by the Nalenchons and Ginuolites, the road fell into decay; but after the restoration of peace, spades were cleaning the bogs and the ax rang in the woods again. And toward the end of the reign of Yadwiga the merchants could safely carry their wares from city to city without their wagons sinking in the mire or breaking down in the ravines. There were only wild beasts and highwaymen to guard against; but against the beast there was the torch at night and the bow in the daytime, while the highwaymen were very few. Provided one was armed and had a retinue, the road was quite safe.

Zbishko feared neither highwaymen nor armed knights, being entirely absorbed with thoughts of the Mazovian court. Was Danusia still with the Princess, or was she the wife of some Mazovian knight? The thought tormented him from morn till night. It sometimes seemed to him impossible that she could have forgotten him; then, again, he thought that Yurand might have arrived from Spichow and married her to some neighbor or friend of his. Did he not say at Cracow that she was not destined to be his, and that he couldn't give her to him? Hence, he must have promised her to another, being bound by a vow, and now he had fulfilled it. As these thoughts crossed his mind he became convinced that he should not find Danusia unmarried. At such moments he called Sanderus and questioned him again. But the latter only made things more confused. Sometimes he would be on the point of recalling Danusia and the wedding; then, suddenly, would place a finger to his lips, reflect, and answer:

"No, it was not she!" He also failed to find her in the wine which was to refresh his memory, and incessantly kept the young knight in a state of suspense, between dread and hope.

And Zbishko rode on in alarm, grief and uncertainty, stopping only here and there to rest his horses. At Lenchitza he caused the board to be suspended, intending to keep Danusia as the mistress of his heart, whether she were married or not. The few knights to whom the clerics read the challenge shrugged their shoulders—they were not familiar with that foreign custom—and said: "There is some fool traveling; for who can agree or disagree with him, when no one ever saw the maiden?" And Zbishko hurried on.

While in the company of Yagenka, Zbishko sometimes forgot Danusia, but now she filled his being day and night. He saw her in his dreams, with her hair falling loosely over her shoulders, lute in hand, in red shoes, and a garland on



her head. She stretched forth her hands to him, while Yurand was drawing her back. When these dreams passed, they were replaced by still greater grief. He never loved her so much as now, when he thought that she must have been taken away from him.

The thought came to his mind that she had been most certainly married against her will. In his soul he did not blame her, because as a child she had no will of her own; but he raged against Yurand and Princess Anna Donuta; and when he thought of the husband of Danusia his heart almost leaped out of his mouth, and he looked with sadness on his servants, who carried their arms under the caparisons. He made a vow to himself that he would not cease to serve her, even if she were married to another; but in that thought there was more sorrow than consolation, for he knew not what he would do after he had placed the peacock plumes at her feet.

The thought of the great war offered some consolation, however. The origin of the rumors was unknown, because there was peace between the King and the Order; and yet, wherever Zbishko stopped, people talked of nothing else. The people had a presentiment, as it were, that war must come. Some even said openly: "Why should we have allied ourselves to the Lithuanians if it was not to fight these crusading wolves? They must be settled with, once for all, otherwise they will never cease to gnaw us." Others said: "What insane monks! The lesson of Plvatzi was wasted on them! Death is hovering over their heads, and yet they have seized the land of Dabryhinsk, which they can only hold with their blood."

Everywhere Zbishko saw quiet but determined preparations for the great conflict of a mighty people, who had suffered too long, and who were finally preparing to wreak a terrible vengeance. Everywhere Zbishko met people who were convinced that they would soon have to mount their horses, and was surprised that the war should be precipitated so speedily, although he believed, with others, that sooner or later they would be led to it. It never occurred to him that the wish of the people outstripped events. He believed others, and not himself, and his heart was gladdened at the sight of these confused preparations for war. All other cares made way for the care of the horses and armament; everywhere inspections were going on of spears, swords, axes, hunting-poles, helmets, cuirasses, straps, etc.

The hammer of the blacksmith resounded day and night. Out of iron plates coarse and heavy weapons were being

forged—too heavy for the elegant knights of the West, but which were borne with ease by the "country squires" of Great and Little Poland. Old men brought forth from the chests bags of rusty coin with which to equip their sons for the war.

Zbishko slept once in the house of a rich nobleman, Bartosh of Bellav, who had twenty-two sons. He had sold his extensive tracts of land to the abbey, in order to buy twenty-two cuirasses and as many helmets and other military equipments. Zbishko decided that he would have to join an expedition, and thanked God that he was so well prepared for it.

His weapons really excited universal wonder. He was taken for the son of some chief, and when he said that he was but a petty nobleman, and that such weapons could be bought of the Germans, provided they were well paid with the sharp edge of the battle-ax, their hearts burned with a desire to engage them.

It was quieter in Moravia, although the people there also believed that war was inevitable; while in Warsaw perfect quiet reigned, because the court was at Tzechanow, which city Yanoush had rebuilt after the Lithuanian attack, which left only the fortification standing.

Zbishko was received at Warsaw by Yasko Socha, overseer of the castle, and son of the Chief Abraham, who had fallen at Worskla. Their meeting was cordial, because they had been together with the Princess at Crakow. Zbishko questioned him about Danusia, whether she had married or not. But Socha could give him no information. The court were at Tzechanow since spring, and only a few men were left at Warsaw. He had heard of the fetes and weddings, but, as a married man, had taken no interest in these matters. He thought, however, that Danusia had not married, because he had not heard of Yurand's coming, without whose presence, of course, it could not have happened. Socha made inquiries of the noblemen and the soldiers in the castle, but no one had heard of Danusia's wedding.

While lying in bed, Zbishko was thinking of dismissing Sauderus; but, on further reflection, he decided to keep the rascal, whose knowledge of German might be useful to him in his contemplated combat with Lichtenstein. Besides, though Sauderus was a heavy charge on him, because he ate and drank enough for four, yet he was serviceable, and evinced an attachment for his master. And as he could also write, he was in that respect above the Czech, and even Zbishko himself.

On the following day they arrived before the gates of

Tzechanow. Zbishko halted at the inn, dressed and armed himself as became a knight, mounted a fine steed, and making the sign of the cross in the air, proceeded.

But he had advanced only a few steps when the Czech caught up with him, and said:

"Your grace, there are some knights coming behind us—Crusaders, I believe."

Zbishko turned his horse, and saw at some distance a magnificent suite, led by two knights on fine horses; both armed cap-a-pie, and each clad in a white cloak with a black cross, and peacock plumes on the helmet.

"They are Crusaders!" said Zbishko.

He involuntarily leaned over in his saddle and placed his spear to the ears of the horse; seeing which the Czech spit in his hand to prevent his ax from slipping out.

Zbishko's servants, experienced and familiar with the military customs, were also getting ready—not for combat, because servants never took part in these affrays; they only measured the distance between the combatants or rammed down the snow on the ground when the combat was on foot. Only the Czech, being a petty nobleman, was preparing for the fray, but he expected Zbishko to make the challenge and then charge.

But Zbishko came to his senses in time. He recalled to mind his act at Cracow, his imprudent attempt to throw himself on Lichtenstein, and all the consequences of his rashness. He handed his spear to the Czech and proceeded to meet the knights. He noticed among them a third knight, with similar plumes, and a fourth one, unarmed, long-haired, who appeared to him like a Mazovi.

"I swore in the dungeon that I should obtain for Danusia as many helmets with peacock crests as there are fingers on my hands," he thought, "and if these knights do not turn out to be envoys, I shall have three now."

But thinking that they were most probably envoys to the Mazovian prince, he sighed heavily and said in a loud voice:

"Glory to our Lord Jesus Christ!"

"Forevermore!" answered the unarmed horseman.

"May God grant you happiness!"

"We wish you the same!"

"Glory to Saint George!"

"He is also our patron."

And they began to greet each other; then Zbishko told him to what order he belonged, and that he was going to the Mazovian court. The long-haired knight said that his

name was Hendryk of Kroplanitz, and that he was bringing guests to the Prince: the brother of Gottfried, the brother of Rodigra and Fulka de Lorche of Loraine, who was visiting the Crusaders, and wished to see with his own eyes the Prince of Mazovia, and especially the Princess, the daughter of the famous "Keikut."

While these names were mentioned, the foreign knights bent their helmet-covered heads, and by the beautiful weapons of Zbishko they took him for a famous knight, a relative, or even the son, of the Prince, sent by the latter to meet them,

And Hendryk continued:

"The Komtive, or, as we call him, the Starosh\* of Zansborg,

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\*The life tenant of a domain, by grant from the Crown.

is visiting the Prince, and he it was who told the Prince of these knights, who wished but dared not come to see him, especially this one from Loraine, who lives at a good distance, and thought that immediately beyond the domain of the Crusaders were the Saracens. The Prince immediately sent me to the frontier to guard them and conduct them safely through the castles."

"So they could not pass without your aid?"

"Our people are very enraged against the Crusaders, but not so much because they make constant attacks on our lands, for we ourselves pay them a visit once in a while, but because they are traitors. When a Crusader embraces and kisses you, he is ready to stab you from behind. That is mean, and it disgusts us Mazovii. Why, even under our own roofs a German would not be harmed, but on the road every Mazovi is only too glad to harass him. There are also those who are constantly wreaking vengeance on them, or do it for glory."

"Who, then, is the most famous among you?"

"There is one whom the Germans fear more than death. His name is Yurand, of Spichow."

The heart of the young knight quivered, and he forthwith made Hendryk untie his tongue.

"I have heard of him," he said. "He is the same man whose daughter, Danusia, was attached to the Princess' court before she was married." Saying which he looked with curiosity in the face of the Mazovian knight, holding his breath.

The Mazovi was very much surprised. It was but six days since he had left Tzechanow, and she was then unmarried, and with the Princess. True, little girls even of her age sometimes marry, but how could she do it during Advent?

Zbishko was on the point of throwing himself on the neck of the Mazovi and shouting: "My God reward you for this information!" but he restrained himself, and said:

"I heard that Yurand had married her to some one."

"The Princess wished to, but not Yurand, and she could not overcome the father's opposition. She wished to marry in Cracow a knight who swore to be loyal to her, and whom she loves."

"She loves him?" cried Zbishko.

Hendryk searchingly looked at Zbishko, smiled, and said:

"You are strangely interested in that girl."

"I am merely making inquiries about acquaintances to whom I am going."

Zbishko's face was hidden by the helmet; only his eyes, nose and part of his cheeks were exposed; but his nose and cheeks were so red that the cunning and jocose Mazovi said:

"The frost has made your nose as red as a Christmas egg."

The youth became still more confused, and answered:

"Very likely."

For some time they rode silently, only the horses sniffing and emitting clouds of vapor from their nostrils. Finally Hendryk asked:

"And what, pray, is your name?"

"Zbishko of Bogdanetz."

"I believe the name of the knight who made a vow to the daughter of Yurand sounds somewhat similar to yours."

"Think you I would disown it?" he said quickly, and with pride.

"Great God! So you are the same Zbishko on whom the maiden placed the billet? On their return from Cracaw you were in the mouth of every courtier, and many wept while listening to the account of your mishap. So it is you? How glad they will be at the court! And how the Princess loves you!"

"May God bless her, and you for the good news. When I was told that she had married, I was even taken ill."

Hendryk told him that though there were many fine fellows at the court, not one even looked her in the eyes, so great was the admiration with which her act and his vow were regarded. When, in order to tease her, someone told her that the knight would not return, she stamped her little feet and cried: "He will return! He will!" And sometimes she would weep when told that he had married another. What joy there would be in the court!

Zbishko swore that he would challenge any one that said such things about him.

Hendryk burst out laughing.

"So you will challenge women? The sword will not prevail against the spindle!"

Zbishko wished to know what they thought at Mazovia of the possibilities of war. The Mazovi did not think that war was near. He had heard the Prince tell Nicholas of Dengollas that the Crusaders had concealed their horns and would gladly return the Dobrjbinsk land, because they fear his power, or that, at all events, they would procrastinate until they were in better fighting condition.

"The Prince went lately to Malborg, where, in the absence of the Magister, he was received by the Grand Marshal, who arranged tournaments for the prince's diversion, and now the Komtur is visiting the prince, and here are other guests——"

He stopped for a moment, then added:

"People think that they have a purpose in visiting us; that the Crusaders desire our princes to ally themselves with them in case of war, or, at least, to remain neutral. But they will not succeed."

"May God grant it. How can they remain neutral? The princes owe allegiance to the King. I do not think you will be able to sit with arms folded."

"We will not."

Zbishko looked again at the foreign knights, and at their peacock plumes, and asked:

"Are these going there for the same purpose?"

"They belong to the Order; perhaps they are—who knows!"

"And the third one?"

"He is coming out of curiosity."

"He must be a distinguished man."

"Yes. Three wagonloads of things, with a retinue of nine men, are following him. One's palms itch for a contest with him."

"But you are forbidden?"

"The Prince commanded me to guard them. They shall not lose a hair of their heads until they arrive at Tzechanow."

"And if I should challenge them, and they were willing to accept the challenge?"

"You would have to fight with me first, for it shall not happen while I live. At Tzechanow they will not be under my protection, and as there will be tournaments, there are also likely to be combats, if the prince permit them."

"I have a board on which is inscribed a challenge to all who

will not admit that Danusia, the daughter of Yurand, is the most beautiful and virtuous maiden in the world. All the people who read this challenge or had it explained to them shrugged their shoulders and laughed."

"Because it is a foreign custom, and, to tell the truth, a foolish one, with which our people, except those of the frontiers, are not familiar. This man from Loraine also provoked people on the road, commanding them to extol some lady; but no one understood him, and I did not permit any fighting."

"How so? He commanded them to extol some lady? Is he not ashamed?"

Zbishko looked at the foreigner, but had to confess that Fulke de Lorche did not look like a common impostor. From under his helmet were seen beautiful eyes, a young face with a sad expression. Zbishko noticed with surprise that around his neck was wound a rope made of hair, the ends of which hung down to his feet.

"Why does he wear that rope?" asked Zbishko.

The Mazovi was not quite certain, because he did not understand Fulke de Lorche's tongue, but he thought that the young knight had made a vow not to remove the rope until he had performed some exploit. During the day he wore it over his weapons, and at night on his naked body.

"Sauderus!" suddenly shouted Zbishko.

"Ask the knight who is the most virtuous and beautiful girl in the world?"

Sauderus complied.

"Ulricha de Ellner!" answered Fulke de Lorche, and, raising his eyes, began to sigh.

Zbishko was so enraged at the insult that he made his horse rear on the spot, but Hendryk rushed between them, and said:

"You will not fight here!"

Zbishko again turned to the relic merchant.

"Tell him that he is in love with a sow."

"My master tells me, noble knight, that you are in love with a sow," echoed Sauderus.

Fulke de Lorche dropped the reins, and with the right hand began to unbutton his iron glove, then threw it on the snow before Zbishko, who winked at the Czech, and the latter raised it on the point of the spear. Hendryk, however, interfered again.

"It was not I that made the challenge! I am aware that you called his lady a sow. But enough! If you insist on fighting, you will see that I, too, can handle a spear!"

"I do not wish to fight with you."

"But you would have to, for I have sworn to guard that knight."

Seeing that Hendryk would not permit them to fight, Zbishko sent Sauderus to tell the Lorraine knight that they would fight as soon as they arrived at Tzechanow. De Lorche nodded his assent, then extended his hand to Zbishko and shook it thrice, which, by custom of the knights, meant that some time and at some place they must fight. Then, with an outward appearance of perfect accord, they proceeded to Tzechanow, where towers were already seen against the red-denning sky.

After the exchange of the customary phrases at the gate, and the lowering of the bridge, they entered the city. It was now very dark. They were received and regaled by Nicholas knights and three hundred archers. The court was absent, to the great chagrin of Zbishko. The prince, desiring to honor the Komturs of Stchitna and Jansborg, arranged a hunt in the Kurnei forests, and to make the affair more pompous the princess and all the court ladies were taking part in it. In the castle he found Ofka, the housekeeper, who was delighted to see the young man, because since they left Cracow she had told everybody of Zbishko's adventure, and of his love for Danusia. These narrations caused her to be respected by the younger courtiers; hence she was grateful to Zbishko, and now she tried to console him.

"You will not recognize her," she said. "Her dresses are getting too small in the waist, for the little bird is getting stout, and she loves you even more than before. If some one should shout 'Zbishko!' in her ear, she would jump like one pricked with an awl. But such is woman's lot! It cannot be helped—it is God's will—and your uncle, you say, is well? Why, then, did he not come?—Such is our lot!—Woman pines and languishes when she is alone. God be praised that Danusia did not break her limbs, for she climbed on the towers every day and glanced eagerly along the road. We all have need of a friend——"

"I will only rest my horses, then I will go to her, even if it is night," answered Zbishko.

"Do go; only take a guide with you from the castle, for you will be lost in the woods."

At supper, with which Nicholas Dlugolias was regaling his guests, Zbishko declared that he was going to the prince, and asked that a guard be assigned to him.

The Crusaders seated themselves around a huge fireplace, in



which the pine crackled, and decided to rest over night and go the following day. But De Lorche, on learning that Zbishko was to go that same night, expressed his wish to join him, else, he said, he would miss the hunt, which he wished to see without fail.

Then, approaching Zbishko, he thrice pressed his hand.

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### CHAPTER III.

The combat did not take place this time either, because Nicholas, on learning of the intentions of Zbishko and De Lorche, made them both promise that they would not fight without the knowledge of the prince and the Komturs, threatening otherwise to lock the gates.

Zbishko was anxious to see Danusia as soon as possible, hence did not resist; and De Lorche, though he fought willingly when there was necessity for it, was not bloodthirsty, and did not hesitate to give his word of honor that he would not fight without the permission of the prince.

The Lotharingian, who had heard many songs of tournaments, and who loved great gatherings of people and fetes, realized the importance of fighting in the presence of the saint, dignitaries and the ladies, hoping that thereby the fame of his victories would spread the quicker and win him the golden spurs. Besides, he wished to see the country and the people, and the wonderful hunting parties arranged by the prince, of which Nicholas had told him so much.

At midnight he and Zbishko set forth with their armed retinues and people with torches, to protect them against the wolves, which swarmed in the winter and were dangerous to small parties, no matter how well armed. On the other side of Tzechanow there were also forests in plenty, which ran into the dense woods of Kurpei and joined on the west with woods of Podlies and distant Luthania. It was but lately that through these very forests Mazovia had been overrun by the Lithuanian barbarians, who, in the year thirteen hundred and thirty-seven, came as far as Tzechanow and raised a revolt in the city.

De Lorche listened with great curiosity to the tales of the old guide Matzko of Turoboi, because his soul was yearning for a battle with the Lithuanians, whom he, like other Western knights, confounded with the Saracens. He came here to join a crusade, win fame and save his soul, and thought that a war even with the Mazovii, a half-heathen people, would

cleanse him of his sins. He therefore did not believe his own eyes when he saw the churches, the crucifixes on the steeples, numerous priests, knights on whose weapons were representations of saints, and the people, hot-tempered, it is true, and turbulent, always ready to fight and quarrel, but nevertheless a Christian people, and less rapacious than the Germans, through whose country the young knight had passed. And, therefore, when he was told that these people had been worshiping Christ for a long time, he did not know what to think of the Crusaders; and when he further learned that the late queen had converted Lithuania, his wonder and grief were boundless.

He began to ask Matzko of Huroboi if there were not at least dragons in these forests, of which the people made sacrificial offerings to the maidens, and with which one could enter into combat; but he was disappointed even in this.

"There is a great variety of wild animals in the forests: wolves, uri, bears, which give us trouble enough," answered the Mazovi. "There may be evil spirits in the bogs, but I have never heard of dragons. If there were any, the Kurpeii would surely be wearing belts made of their skins!"

"Who are these people, and can they be engaged in battle?" asked De Lorche.

"Yes, but it will not do," answered Matzko; "it would not be worthy of a knight to engage them, because they are a common people."

"The Swiss are also a common people. Do these Kurpeii worship Christ?"

"There are no others in Mazovia, and all belong to us and our prince. Have you seen the archers in the castle? They are all Kurpeii, and were chosen because there are no better archers in the world."

"The Englishmen and Scotchmen whom I have seen at the Burgundy court——"

"I, too, have seen them," interrupted the Mazovi. "They are brave men, but it were better for them to keep out of the way of the Kurpeii. A Kurpei boy of seven is not permitted to eat until he brings his food down with an arrow from the top of a pine tree."

"What are you speaking of?" asked Zbishko, hearing the word "Kurpeii" repeated.

"We are speaking of the Kurpeian and English archers. The knight says that the English and Scotch are the best."

"I have seen them at Wilno, and have heard their arrows whistle. There were knights from all countries, who were

boasting that they would eat us without salt, but upon trial it was found that they had lost their taste for the food."

Matzko laughed and repeated these words to De Lorche.

"It was talked of at various courts," answered the Lotharingian, "and the daring of young knights was praised, but they were reproached for defending the heathen against the Cross."

"We were defending a people who wished to be baptized against attacks and injustices. The Germans wish to leave them in paganism, that they may have a pretext for war."

"God will punish them for it," said De Lorche.

"And probably very soon," answered Matzko.

The Lotharingian had heard of the combat between four Polish and four French knights, and having been told that Zbishko had fought at Wilno, he treated the latter with great respect, and was elated that he was not to fight a common man.

They were apparently on the best of terms, showing little favors to and regaling each other. When, from the conversation of the Lotharingian with Matzko, Zbishko gathered that Ulricha de Ellner was a forty-year-old woman who had six children, he was even more indignant at the strange foreigner who had not only dared to compare some "old woman" to Danusia, but had actually demanded superiority for her. He decided, however, that the man must be insane, and had best be confined in a darkened cell. This thought calmed his indignation. He then confided to Matzko his suspicion that there was a devil in the man's head.

Matzko said that there were cases when a hundred devils got into a man's head, and that when they are cramped for room they move into the heads of other people. The worst are those that come from women. Then he suddenly turned to De Lorche.

"Glory to our Lord Jesus Christ!"

"And I also praise His name," replied the astonished De Lorche.

Matzko calmed down.

"You see, now, that if he were possessed of the devil he would foam at the mouth or strike the ground with his head, for I mentioned the name of the Saviour unexpectedly. We may proceed on our journey."

Because of the snow and the darkness, they necessarily traveled slowly, and it was daybreak when they reached the out-houses which lay on the skirt of the forest. The main house, which on one side faced the forest, was a large, wooden struc-

ture with real glass windows. Before the house was a well, and around the house were strewn hastily made wigwams of pine twigs and some of hides. The fire of the woodpiles flamed brightly in the pale dawn, and the foresters stood around in fur coats, with the fur outside, and with the heads of animals for headgear. Some were leaning on their hunting-poles; others were making nets of ropes; still others were frying large pieces of venison or urus meat, in preparation, apparently, for the morning feast.

The flames of the fire fell on the snow, lighting these strange figures, somewhat enwrapped in the smoke of the woodpiles, the vapor of their own breath and the steam of the frying meat. In the faint light of the morning twilight could be seen the trunks of immense pine trees, and various groups of people, the number of which surprised the Lotharingian, who was unaccustomed to such spectacles.

Among the groups were also women, who had come with the foresters either from curiosity or to exchange their wares for products of the forests. The Kurpeil were averse to leaving the confines of their forest homes, so the townsfolk brought to the frontier of this forest their famous beer, flour, ground in the city mills; salt, a rare and very necessary article to the forests; iron ore, leather belts and similar articles; and in exchange for them received hides, furs, dried mushrooms, medicinal herbs and pieces of amber. The prince's farmhouse thus became a bazaar.

The court was rising, and people began to flit in and out of the house, and presently the odor of fat and saffron came from the chinks of the walls. Finally, the doors opened with a creaking noise, disclosing a brightly lighted hall, and a man appeared whom Zbishko recognized as one of the courtiers he had met at Cracow.

Zbishko, with a single leap, was near the man, and the wondering Lotharingian asked:

"What has happened to that young knight?"

"Nothing has happened," answered Matzko. "He is in love with one of the court ladies, and wishes to see her as soon as possible."

"Ah!" said De Lorche, pressing his heart with both hands, and, raising his eyes to heaven, he began to sigh.

They were all soon in the spacious hall, ornamented with hides and horns, which were lighted by the flames of the dry wood piled in the fireplace. New courtiers were constantly coming in, all stalwart, brave men, somewhat coarse, but tall, broad-shouldered, yellow-haired, and dressed for the hunt.

Zbishko was treated by everybody with great respect; some looked upon him with wonder, as one who has barely escaped the executioner's ax is usually looked upon.

Trumpets sounded, announcing that the prince had seated himself at the breakfast table; they sounded a second and a third time, then the doors on the right opened, and the princess stepped forth with a wonderful little girl, bearing a lute on her shoulder.

Seeing her, Zbishko moved forward, and, placing his hands on his lips, sank to his knees, his entire figure showing respect and adoration.

A whisper of astonishment arose in the room; not only were the Mazovii surprised, but many disliked Zbishko's conduct.

"He has probably brought the custom from abroad," said the older ones, "and may be from the pagans, because even the Germans have no such custom."

The younger ones thought: "No wonder; he owes his life to her."

The princess and Danusia did not recognize him at once, the princess evidently thinking that it was one of the courtiers who had incurred the displeasure of the prince, and was seeking her intercession. Danusia, however, whose sight was sharper, made a step forward, and, stooping, she suddenly cried out in a frightened voice:

"Zbishko!"

And without further thought, and notwithstanding the eyes of the entire court were upon her, she sprang forward like a gazelle and threw herself on Zbishko's neck, kissing his eyes, lips and cheeks, embracing him and shouting with delight, until the gathering burst out laughing. Then the princess forced her away.

Danusia then looked around her, and, much confused, she quickly hid herself in the folds of the princess' dress, the crown of her head only being seen.

Zbishko fell at the feet of the princess, who raised him, and began to inquire about Matzko, his health and so forth. Zbishko made distracted answers, being entirely absorbed with Danusia, and looking now to one side, now to the other, in his attempt to see Danusia, who would peep out from the folds, then hide herself again.

The Mazovii could not restrain themselves, and laughed to exhaustion. The prince himself laughed until the smoking dishes were brought in.

The princess then turned to Zbishko and said:

"Wait now upon us, our dear servant. And you, little but-

terfly, come out of the folds, or you will finally tear my dress."

Danusia came forth at last, red in the face, constantly raising her frightened and abashed eyes to Zbishko, and was so beautiful that not only Zbishko's heart, but those of other people, began to melt. The chief of the Crusaders of Stchitna pressed his hand to his big, moist lips, while De Lorche became agitated.

"In the name of James of Kampostelli, who is that girl?" he asked.

The chief rose on tip-toe, for, notwithstanding his stoutness, he was small of stature, and whispered in the ear of the Lotharingian:

"It is the daughter of the devil!"

De Lorche looked at him, winked his eyes, then knit his brow, and said with a nasal twang:

"The knight is wrong who laughs at beauty,"

"I am wearing gold spurs, and, besides, I am a monk," slowly said Hugo de Dansfeldt.

These girdled knights were so honored that the Lotharingian lowered his head, but in a moment answered:

"I am related to the Brabant princes."

"Pax! Pax!" answered the Crusader. "Glory to the mighty princes and the friends of the Order, at whose hands you shall soon receive your golden spurs. I do not deny that the girl is beautiful, but I will tell you who her father is."

But they were interrupted by Prince Yanoush seating himself at the table, who, having learned from the prefect of Jansborg of the famous relatives of De Lorche, invited him to sit at his side. Opposite to them sat the princess and Danusia, and Zbishko stationed himself behind the latter, as he had once done at Cracow, to wait upon them.

He looked at Danusia with admiration and exultation—at her little flaxen head, her red cheeks, at the outline of her shoulders, which had lost their childish form, and he felt an influx of a new feeling of love, which flooded his heart. On his eyes and cheeks he still felt the impression of her kisses. Formerly she had kissed him like a brother, and he had received the kisses as from a pretty child; but now he experienced the same feelings that had stirred him when he was near Yagenka. A certain oppression and lassitude, in which passion was hidden like fire under a heap of ashes was taking possession of him.

Danusia seemed to him a perfectly mature girl, and she really had grown up and was in perfect bloom. Besides, everybody around her was constantly speaking of love, so

that she had ripened and opened to it like a flower warmed by the sun; and in this process her beauty acquired something alluring, strong and intoxicating; she diffused a certain warmth; she was as fragrant as a rose.

Zbishko stood like one bewitched. He did not notice the people looking at him and Danusia, nor that they were laughing and nudging each other with their elbows. He did not notice the petrified face of De Lorche, nor the bulging eyes of the prefect of Ichitna, which he never removed from Danusia, and which, reflecting the flames of the fireplace, seemed red and glistening like those of a wolf. He came to himself only when the trumpets sounded again, announcing the start of the hunt, when Anna Danuta turned to him and said:

"You will go with us, and talk to the girl of love. I shall listen to you with pleasure."

Saying which, she and Danusia withdrew to dress for the chase, while Zbishko ran out of the hall into the courtyard, where the horses were waiting for the prince, princess, guests and the courtiers.

The huntsmen had already disappeared in the thick of the forest. The fires were paling away, the day was clear, frosty and from the trees the dry, sparkling hoar-frost was falling to the ground.

The prince soon appeared and mounted a horse, followed by a servant who carried a bow and spear—so long and heavy that few could raise it. The prince, however, handled it with ease, for he, like other Mazovian chiefs, possessed great strength. Some women of their race, when marrying foreign princes, exhibited their strength at the wedding feast by bending iron sabres with their fingers. (This was the case with Zimbarka on her marriage with Ernest, the iron Habsburg.) There were two other men with the prince, who had been chosen from all the Warsaw and Tzchanow population for their enormous strength. They were terrible to look at, and with their immense beards resembled stumps of forest trees. The Lotharingian looked at them with great wonder. Then came the princess and Danusia, dressed in hoods of white fox skins. The true daughter of Keistut could "sew" better with an arrow than with a needle, and therefore a bow was carried for her, but a lighter one than those used by the others. The train stretched in a long line on the skirt of the forest, like the colored border of a dark cloth, and gradually disappeared in the dark forest.

They had advanced a considerable distance, when the princess, turning to Zbishko, said:

"Why are you silent? Speak to her."

Zbishko was silent for some time, because he was timid, but he finally spoke:

"Danusia!"

"Well, Zbishko?"

"I love you so——"

He stopped, searching for words of which he was short; for notwithstanding he had fallen at her feet, knight fashion, and in every possible way showed her veneration, and endeavored to avoid common expressions, his efforts to appear a true courtier now failed, because from his overfilled soul only ordinary words came forth.

And after a short silence he continued:

"I love you so that my breath fails me."

She raised her blue eyes, and her face, which by this time the cold had nipped into a rose color, and hastily responded:

"And I, too, Zbishko!"

And she immediately lowered her eyelashes, for she knew that it was love.

"Ah! My dear girl!" exclaimed Zbishko. "Ah!" And again he was silent from an overflow of happiness and excitement. But the good princess, whose curiosity was excited, came to his aid.

"Tell us," said she, "how you have grieved in her absence. And if you kiss her lips when we come to a thicket, I will not be angry, because thereby you will prove your love for her."

And he began to relate how he had grieved at Bogdanetz, under the constant guard of Matzko and amid his "neighbors." Yagenka the rogue did not mention, and he was even sincere, for at that moment he so loved Danusia that he wished to seize her, seat her on his horse, and press her closely to his breast.

He dared not do it, however. Instead, when the thick bushes divided them from the rest of the procession he bent over, embraced her, and hid his face in her fur hood, thereby attesting his love for her.

But as there are no leaves on trees in the winter, Hugo de Dansfeldt and de Lorche witnessed his rapturous performance, as did all the courtiers, whereupon they began to talk of it to each other.

"He has kissed her in the presence of the Princess! I am sure that she will arrange their wedding."



"He is a clever fellow, but the blood of Yurand is also hot!"

"They are like steel and tinder, although the girl seems to be afraid. Watch for the sparks! He clutched her like a wood-tick."

Thus they spoke, laughing; and Dansfeldt, turning to De Lorche, his goatlike, wicked, and, at the same time, pleasant face, asked:

"Would you not, sir, that some Merlin had transformed you by his magic power into that young knight?"

"And you, sir?" asked de Lorche.

And the Crusader, in whom envy and passion had been aroused, impatiently whipped his horse and exclaimed:

"Indeed, I would!" But he immediately bethought himself of his position, and said with lowered head:

"I am a monk, and have vowed to observe purity." And he quickly glanced at de Lorche, expecting to see a smile on his face, because in that respect the Order had a bad reputation, especially Hugo de Dansfeldt. Some years ago, when he was assistant prefect of Sambia, the complaints against him were so frequent that, notwithstanding all the indulgence shown such acts at Malborg, it became necessary to transfer him to the post of prefect of the Stchitna castle. On arriving here, on a secret mission, and seeing the charming daughter of Yurand, he had become passionately enamored of her. But as the name of Yurand was associated in his mind with terrible recollections, his passion had changed into wild hatred.

"You called this girl the daughter of the devil. What was your reason for calling her thus?" asked de Lorche.

Dansfeldt began to relate the story of Zlotaria—how, while the castle was being built, the Prince, with his retinue, was seized, and how the mother of that child perished, for which Yurand ever since was avenging her death on all the Knights of the Order. And the hatred which rankled in the breast of the Crusader gushed forth like an avalanche. His reasons were personal. Two years ago he had also met Yurand, but at the sight of that "wild bull of Spichow" his heart had sunk for the first time in his life, and forgetting his two relatives, his servants and the booty, like a madman he ran all day to Stchitna, where for a long time he lay sick from fright.

When he recovered, the Great Magister of the Order caused him to be tried by a court of the knights. He was acquitted, because Dansfeldt swore by the cross and on his honor that the frightened horse carried him away from the battlefield; but the doors to honorable posts were forever closed against him. All this was not mentioned by the Crusader, but he

made so many complaints against Yurand and the entire Polish people that the Lotharingian was bewildered.

"But we are now with the Mazovii, and not the Poles!" said De Lorche.

"It is a separate duchy, but the people are the same," answered the steward. "They are equally immoral, and have the same hatred for the Order. May God help the German sword to exterminate that race!"

"You are right, if this prince attempted to build his castle on your land, for of such iniquity I have not heard even among the pagans."

"He built the castle against us, but Zlatoria is on his own land, not on ours."

"Then glory to our Lord Jesus Christ that he permitted you to conquer him. What was the result of the war?"

"There was no war."

"And your victory at Zlatoria?"

"God blessed us even then. There was no army with the prince, only his retinue and women."

De Lorche looked with wonder at the Crusader.

"How so? Then you attacked women and the prince in times of peace, while he was building a castle on his own land?"

"For the glory of the Order and Christianity no act is iniquitous."

"And that terrible knight only seeks to avenge his young wife, killed in peaceful times?"

"He who raises his hand against a Crusader is the son of darkness."

Hearing which, De Lorche wondered; but he was prevented from answering Dansfeldt, for a glade covered with snow opened before them, and the prince dismounted from his horse, the rest of the company following his example.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

The wily foresters stationed the hunters at the edge of the glade, under the leadership of the chief hunter, so that they themselves should have a free space before them to facilitate the shooting. On the two shorter sides of the glade nets were stretched, behind which were hidden those hunters whose duty it was to drive the beast to the archers, or, if it should not be caught in their meshes, to fall upon it with their spears. The large number of Kurpell, skillfully distributed, had to

chase every animal from the thickets into the glade. Behind the archers was another net, intended to obstruct any fleeing beast that managed to break through their ranks. The prince stood in the middle of the ranks, on a slight declivity, which ran the width of the glade. The chief hunter, Mrokota, chose for him that position, knowing that from that declivity must come the largest beast of the forest. In his hand the prince held a bow, and beside him, resting against a tree, stood the enormous spear, while some distance behind him, with battle axes on their shoulders, stood two "protectors," powerful and terrible, who also carried each a bow, ready to hand to the prince in case of necessity. The princess and Danusia remained on their horses, on which it was easier to save one's self from an enraged beast than on foot. De Lorche, whom the prince had invited to a place on his right, asked permission to remain on his horse for the protection of the ladies, and stationed himself not far from the princess, resembling, with his long spear, a huge nail, much to the merriment of the Mazovii, who regarded his weapon as unfit for the chase.

Zbishko, meanwhile, had stuck his spear into his saddle, tied his bow to his shoulders, and, standing near Danusia, raised his eyes to her, whispered to her, embraced her feet, or kissed her knees, not attempting to hide his love any longer. He became quiet only when Mrokota, who, in the forest, permitted himself to get angry even with the prince, sternly commanded him to do so.

Meantime, away in the thick of the forest sounds of horns were heard, which were answered from the glade by the shrill sound of a trumpet; then perfect silence reigned. Only the twitter of a jay was heard now and then in the tops of the pines, or sometimes the men croaked in imitation of a crow. The hunters directed their attention to the open white space where the wind played with the dry bulrushes and the nude willow tops, and everybody waited impatiently for the first game. The forest was full of uri, wild boars and auroches. The Kurepii had smoked out a few bears from their haunts, which were now roaming through the forest, hungry and fierce, apprehending a struggle, not only for shelter, but for life itself. The wait was long, because the beaters had made too large a circle. The quick-scented wolves were the first to appear in the glade in their attempt to run out of the circle, but scenting the people, disappeared again in search of another exit.

Then came a long, black chain of wild boars, looking from a distance like an ordinary drove of hogs hastening to the

call of the mistress. And now they stopped, pricked their ears and sniffed the air, turning, and then again listened, and scenting the hunters, approached carefully, when suddenly a continuous whistle of arrows was heard, and the first blood spotted the snowy ground.

A despairing whine split the air, and the entire drove scattered as if thunderstruck. Some ran forward, others ran toward the net, still others began to run singly, and in groups, mingling with other beasts which had now filled the glade. Nothing similar could be seen in foreign countries, or even in other Polish lands. Although the Crusaders had been in Lithuania, where they had seen *uri* break through the ranks of the soldiers, creating the utmost confusion, they were, nevertheless, surprised to see such a great number of wild beasts. De Lorche was surprised most of all.

Standing guard, like a crane, over the princess and the court ladies, and being unable to speak to any of them, he began to grow weary and to freeze in his iron equipment, and thought that the chase was a failure. But now he saw before him a herd of fleet-footed gazelles, yellow deer, and elk with large foreheads, all commingled, running around the glade, blinded with fear and vainly seeking to escape.

The Kelstut blood of the princess was up, and, seizing a bow, she sent arrow after arrow into this variegated crowd, and made exclamations of delight when a deer or elk sprang on its hind legs and fell to the ground, kicking up the snow. Other courtiers, seized with the fever of the chase, followed her example.

Zbishko's thoughts were far from the chase, however; resting with his elbows on Danusia's knees, and leaning his head on her hands, he looked in her eyes, while she, half smiling, half confused, tried to close his eyelids, as if she could not bear his glance.

The attention of De Lorche was entirely concentrated on a huge gray bear, which suddenly rushed out of the thicket some distance from the archers. The prince sent an arrow into the bear, and then sprang toward him with a spear, and when the bear rose on his hind legs, roaring terribly, he so dexterously pierced him that not one of the "protectors" had to use his ax.

To the Lotharingian it seemed extraordinary bravery, of which the prince whom he had previously seen were hardly capable; and he thought that with such princes and such people the Order might in the future have great trouble. Later he saw similar feats performed by other Mazovii, with beasts more fierce than any found in the forests of Lower Lorraine or

in the German thickets. Such true aims, such strokes of the spear, he had never before witnessed. But he explained it by the fact that people who grow up in forests become accustomed to the use of the bow and spear from childhood, and acquire extreme skill in handling them.

The glade was finally strewn with the carcasses of various kinds of beasts. But the most interesting, as well as dangerous, moment did not arrive till a few uris appeared in the glade. Although they kept separately in the forest, they now came in a drove. Not blinded with fear, but rather fierce, they ran not very fast, as if conscious of their terrible strength, convinced of their ability to break through all obstacles. However, the earth began to tremble under their weight. The bearded bulls, running in front of the drove, halted now and then, their foreheads lowered, as if considering and weighing which side to take. From their powerful breasts came roars like the rumbling of an earthquake; their nostrils emitted streams of vapor; and, digging the snow with their forelegs, they seemed to search the hidden foe with their bloodshot eyes.

Meantime, the hunters raised a dreadful cry, which was caught up by a hundred throats; trumpets sounded, horns blew, and the forest trembled to its innermost depths. At the same moment the Kurpeian dogs dashed into the glade with an earsplitting noise. In the twinkling of an eye a she urus, with cub, became enraged, causing the drove to scatter in all directions.

A yellow bull of almost monstrous proportions, with heavy leaps, dashed against the archers, then turned to the right, and, seeing horses before him, stopped, and, roaring, began to dig the earth with his horns, as if preparing to leap for a struggle.

At the sight of that dreadful spectacle the beaters raised even a greater cry, and among the hunters were heard frightened voices:

"The princess! the princess! Save her! Save her!"

Zbishko grasped his spear and ran to the spot, and behind him came running several Lithuanians, who were willing to perish for the daughter of Keistut; and at the same time an arrow shot from her hands, and, passing over the inclined head of the bull, entered his back.

"I have him!" exclaimed the princess. "He will not come——"

But her words were interrupted by such a terrible roar that even the horses were thrown on their haunches. The bull

leaped apparently straight at the princess. But suddenly, from behind the trees, sprang the valiant De Lorche, and leveling his spear as at a tournament, dashed against the beast.

Those present only saw for one moment the spear stuck in the back of the bull, which was bent like a bow; then the horned forehead disappeared under the horse of De Lorche, and before any one could cry out, horse and horseman flew into the air as if hurled from a catapult.

The horse fell on its side and began to kick in its death agonies; De Lorche lay some distance away, and the bull, apparently hesitated whether or not to leave them and make for the other horses. But seeing before him this first victim, he again turned to and began to tear the unfortunate horse to pieces, digging with his horns into its bowels.

The people ran to the assistance of the foreign knight. Zbishko, who was guarding the princess and Danusia, was the first to reach him, and plunged his hunting pole under the shoulder blade of the beast. But he struck with such force that from the suddenness of his movement the hunting pole broke in his hand, and he fell with his face on the snow.

"He is lost! He is lost!" came the voices of the Mazovii, who were running to his aid.

Meantime, the head of the bull covered Zbishko and pressed him to the ground. From the prince's side two "protectors" came running to his aid, which would have been too late if, fortunately, the Czech had not got there before them. In a few leaps the Czech reached the side of Zbishko and struck with his ax across the back of the bull, almost severing the head from the body. In a moment the two "protectors" dragged off the carcass, which had fallen on Zbishko, while the princess and Danusia hastened to the youth.

Pale, and covered with his own and the bull's blood, he raised himself, attempted to stand up, but swayed, fell on his knees, and, leaning on his hands, could utter but one word:

"Danusia!"

The blood rushed from his throat and he became unconscious. They rubbed him with snow, poured wine into his mouth, and finally the huntsman Mrokota ordered him placed on a caparison, and the flow of blood stopped with soft-wood sponges.

"He will live if only his ribs are broken," said the huntsman, turning to the princess.

It was found that, except for a dislocated arm, De Lorche was entirely unhurt, being only stunned; and when some wine

had been poured into his mouth he opened his eyes, and seeing some young and beautiful court ladies leaning over him,

"I am surely in heaven, and angels stand over me!"

True, the ladies did not understand what he said, but, satisfied that he was alive, began to smile, and with the aid of some huntsmen, he was raised from the ground. He moaned, feeling pain in his right arm, and with his left rested on the shoulder of one of the "angels." For a moment he stood motionless, fearing to attempt to walk, because he felt no strength in his legs. He looked around and saw the yellow carcass of the bull, saw Danusia wringing her hands over Zbishko, and Zbishko himself lying on the caparison.

"That knight rushed to my rescue," said De Lorche; "is he alive?"

"He is dangerously wounded," answered one of the courtiers, who understood German.

"From now on I will fight for, and not against him!" answered the Lotharingian.

The prince, after seeing Zbishko, approached De Lorche and praised him for the bold act, which probably had saved the life of the princess and those of the other ladies. There were gifts and glory in store for him, from the living and from posterity. "In these effeminate times, true knights are getting fewer. Remain my guest as long as possible, or remain altogether in Mazovia, for my good will you already have, and the love of the people you will earn by virtuous acts."

The heart of De Lorche, who was yearning for glory, was melting as he heard these words, and when he thought that he had done a valiant act in a country of which wonderful things were told in the western countries, he was so happy that he forgot the pain in his arm. He understood that a knight who could say at the courts of Brabant and Burgundy that he had saved the Mazovian princess would be surrounded with rays of glory.

As he was about to kneel before the princess and swear to her eternal fidelity, he again became unconscious. His arms hung lifeless, and faint gasps came from his open mouth. The huntsmen thought that he would not recover, but the Kurpeii, who bore traces of bears' paws and bulls' horns on their bodies, said that one or two of his ribs might be broken, but that he would recover, since his spine was unhurt. They also pointed out that on the place where Zbishko lay was a snow mound; hence, though the bull had pressed against his breast, his spine would be found to be unhurt. The court physician, who usually follows the hunters, was busy baking wafers. The

Czech galloped away after him, but meanwhile the Kurpell carried Zbishko to the prince's house.

Danusia wished to follow on foot, but the princess opposed it, because the snow lay high on the road, and it was necessary to hasten. Dansfeldt helped the girl to mount her horse, and, escorting her behind the people bearing Zbishko, he said to her in a low voice:

"I have a wonderful healing balsam at Stchitua, which I obtained from a hermit, and which I could bring in three days."

"May God reward you," answered Danusia.

"God keeps account of every act of mercy, but may I expect to receive a reward from you?"

"How can I reward you?"

The Crusader came close to her, apparently desiring to tell her something, but hesitated, and in a little while said:

"In the Order, besides brethren, there are also sisters. One of them will bring the healing balsam, then we will speak of the reward."

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## CHAPTER V.

The priest, Wyshonok, the court physician, on examining Zbishko, said that one of his ribs was broken, but that he did not know "whether his heart had not turned upside down, or his abdomen had been torn from its place."

Toward evening De Lorche became much worse, and was obliged to take to his bed, and on the following day could not move hand or foot without feeling pain in all his bones.

The princess and Danusia were tending to the sick and preparing all sorts of salves and medicaments, under the supervision of the priest, Wyshonok.

Zbishko was weak, but conscious, and having learned from Danusia who it was that had saved his life, sent for the Czech to thank and reward him. He then involuntarily thought that it was Yagenka who had sent him, and that but for her kind heart he would have perished. The thought oppressed him, for he felt that he could not repay the girl for all her kindness, and that he was only the cause of grief to her. "True," he immediately said to himself: "But I cannot tear myself in two!" But yet, there was in the depth of his soul a lingering doubt which the brave act of the Czech only made more keen.

"I have sworn to my mistress," said the Czech, "that I



should guard you, and I will do so without any reward. You owe your life to her, not to me, master!"

Zbishko made no answer, but began to breathe quickly. The Czech, after a short silence, continued:

"If you command me to hasten to Bogdanetz, I will do so. Maybe you wish to see the old master, for Heaven knows what may happen to you."

"What did the priest Wyshonok say?" asked Zbishko.

"The priest said that the new moon will show your condition, and the new moon is due in four days."

"Ah! Then, why go to Bogdanetz? Either I will die before uncle arrives or I will recover."

"You should at least send a letter to Bogdanetz. Sauderus will write it properly. Then they will know of your condition and may order mass said for you."

"Leave me alone now, because I am sick. If I die, you will return to Zgojhelitzi and tell them how it happened. They will then order mass. I will be buried either here or in Tzechanow."

"It were better in Tzechanow or Prjhasnysh, because only Kurpeii are buried in the forest, where only wolves howl over them. I have heard the servants say that the prince, with his entire court, will in two days return to Tzechanow, and then to Warsaw."

"I suppose they will not leave me here," answered Zbishko.

And really, on the same day the princess asked permission of the prince to remain in the house with Danusia, the court ladies and the priest, who was against moving Zbishko so soon.

De Lorche was much improved, and rose from his bed; but when he heard that "the ladies" were to remain, he remained also to escort them on their return, and to defend them against a possible attack by "the Saracens." Whence these "Saracens" were to appear, the brave Lotharingian never asked himself. True, in the far west the Lithuanians were so named, but there was no danger from that quarter to the daughter of Keistut, sister of Wierolt and cousin of the mighty "King of Cracow," Yagella. But De Lorche had lived too long among the Crusaders not to expect the very worst from the Lithuanians, notwithstanding he had heard in Mazovia of the gaining of two crowns on one head. He had been told so by the Crusaders, and he had not lost faith in them yet.

Meanwhile, something happened that threw a shadow on the relations of Prince Yanoush to his Crusader visitors. The day before the prince departed, there arrived at the court the

brethren Gottfried and Rotger, who were first at Tzechnow, and with them came a certain knight named De Fursi, with unpleasant information for the Crusaders. It so happened that the foreign guests, De Fursi, De Bergow and Maineger, who had visited the Crusaders at Lubow, and who had rendered great services to the Order, when they had heard the stories about Yurand, not only were not frightened, but had decided to convince themselves whether he was as terrible as he was said to be. The starost of the Crusaders refused to give his consent, pointing to the peace existing between the Order and the Duchy of Mazovia; but finally, hoping perhaps to rid himself of the terrible neighbor, he not only shut his eyes to the undertaking, but even permitted them to take armed servants with them. The knights sent a challenge to Yurand, who immediately accepted it on condition that they come unattended, and the three agreed to meet him and three of his friends on the very frontier between Prussia and Spichow. But as they refused to send away their servants, or to leave the land belonging to Spichow, he attacked them, killed the servants, pierced Maineger with a spear, and took De Bergow a prisoner, and threw him into an underground dungeon. Only De Fursi had saved himself, and after wandering for three days in the Mazovian forests, and hearing that some brethren of the Order were visiting Tzechanow, he made his way to that place to make complaint, together with his brethren, to the prince; to ask that Yurand might be punished, and that De Bergow be released.

This news strained the relations between the prince and his visitors, for not only the two brethren, but Hugo de Dansfeldt and Zigfried de Loewe, demanded that the prince defend the rights of the Order, rid the frontier of the highwayman, and punish him for all his transgressions. Hugo de Dansfeldt, in particular, who had old accounts to settle with Yurand, the memory of which caused him pain and brought the color of shame to his face, made threats of revenge.

"The complaint will be sent to the Grand Magister," he said, "if we do not find justice in your court. He himself will judge between us, even if all the highwaymen of Mazovia take his part."

The prince, naturally peaceful, became wrathful and said:

"What kind of justice are you seeking? If Yurand had first attacked you, burned the villages, driven off the cattle and killed your men, I should, of course, call him to account and punish him. But your knights attacked him first. Your chief permitted them to take servants to the fight. And Yurand ac-

cepted the challenge, merely desiring that the servants be sent away. For what, then, shall I call him to account? For what shall I punish him? You have incurred the enmity of a terrible man, and have brought sorrow upon your own heads. What would you have now? Must I command him not to defend himself when it pleases you to attack him?"

"It was not the Order that attacked him, but strangers—visiting knights," answered Hugo.

"The Order is responsible for its guests; besides, these were servants from Lubow."

"Should the chief have sent them to certain destruction?"

In answer to this the prince turned to Zigfried and said:

"Your quibbling shocks all sense of reason, and your shiftings are an offence to God."

But the stern Zigfried answered:

"De Bergow must be released from the dungeon, because the men of his family were chiefs of the Order, and have done great service to the Cross."

"And the death of Maineger must be avenged," added Hugo de Dansfeldt.

The prince rose from the bench, and with ill-boding mein approached the Germans. In a moment, however, he remembered that they were his guests, and, restraining himself, he placed his hand on Zigfried's shoulder and said:

"Listen, starost. You wear a cross on your gown; therefore, answer me sincerely—in the name of the Cross! Was Yurand right or wrong?"

"De Bergow must be released," answered Zigfried. A moment of silence ensued. Finally the prince said:

"May God send me patience!"

And Zigfried continued in a voice as sharp as the strokes of a sword:

"This insult given to us by assailing the persons of our guests is but another cause for complaint. Never since the birth of the Order has any one, either in Palestine, in Transylvania, or even in pagan Lithuania, caused us so much evil as did this highwayman of Spichow. Your grace, we demand a trial and punishment, not for one offence, but for a thousand; not for one battle, but for fifty; not for blood spilled once, but for years of similar acts—for which a fire from Heaven ought to burn down that godless nest of wickedness and crime. Whose moans are calling for God's vengeance? Ours! Whose tears? Ours! In vain we have made complaints; in vain we begged for justice! Never was justice done us!"

Hearing which, the prince shook his head and answered:

"Ah! The Crusaders were visiting Spichow before, but Yurand was not your enemy until the woman he loved died as a result of your attack. But how often have you yourself provoked him, wishing to wipe him from the face of the earth, because he had challenged and conquered your knights? How often have you sent murderers on him, and shot arrows at him from hidden places in the forest? It is true, he had attacked you, but it was because he was consumed by a desire to revenge himself on you; but have you not, or the knights who settled on your lands, attacked peaceful people in Mazovia, driven off their flocks, burned their villages, and killed men, women and children? And when I complained to the Magister, he answered me from Malborg: 'It is but a common frontier disorder!' Please do not bother me! It is not for you to complain—you who have seized me, unarmed, in times of peace, and on my own land. And were it not for your fear of the King's wrath I would probably even now be languishing in one of your underground dungeons. That is how you rewarded me, a descendant of your benefactors. So, cease your complaints, for it is not for you to speak of justice!"

The Crusaders glanced at each other, feeling uncomfortable at the mention of the events at Zlotoria in the presence of De Fursi; therefore, Hugo, desiring to put an end to further conversation, said:

"As to the person of your highness, there was a blunder, which we corrected, not from fear of the King of Cracow, but from a feeling of justice; and our Magister cannot be held responsible for the frontier disorders, for there is not a kingdom in the world where they do not occur."

"You say that yourself, and yet you demand the prosecution of Yurand. What, then, do you wish?"

"We wish justice and punishment."

The prince clenched his wiry fists and repeated:

"May God send me patience!"

"Let your highness remember, also," continued Dansfeldt, "that our people attack only secular people, not belonging to the German race, while yours raise their hand against the German Order, which offends the Saviour himself. And no punishment or torture is too severe for one who offends the Cross!"

"Listen!" exclaimed the prince. "You leave God alone; for you cannot deceive him!" And taking the Crusader by the shoulders, he shook him.

The latter quailed, and said in a softer voice:

"If it is true that our guests made the attack on Yurand

first, then I do not praise them for it; but is it true that Yurand accepted the challenge?"

Saying which, he glanced at De Fursi, stealthily winking, as though desiring him to give a negative answer; but De Fursi either would not or could not make such an answer.

"He wished that all three of us should fight him, first sending our men away."

"Are you certain of it?"

"Upon my honor! Myself and De Bergow were willing, but Maineger refused."

The prince again interfered.

"Chief of Stchitna!" he exclaimed. "You know better than other people that Yurand never refuses to accept a challenge." And turning to the rest of the company, he continued: "If any one of you wishes to challenge him to single combat, on horse or on foot, you have my permission. And if Yurand is killed, or taken prisoner, then De Bergow will get his liberty without a ransom. And do not ask for more than that, because you will not get it."

After these words a deep silence reigned. Hugo and Zigfried, and Rotger and Gottfried, though brave men, knew the terrible owner of Spichow too well to undertake a life and death combat with him. Only a foreigner could venture on it—such as De Lorche or De Fursi; but the former was not present at the conversation, and the latter was quite sated with his experience.

"I have seen him once and do not wish to see him again," he murmured.

"Monks have no right to enter into a combat," said Zigfried de Loewe, "except with the special permission of the Magister or the Great Marshal. But we have not come here to ask for permission to fight, but to obtain the release of De Bergow, and the execution of Yurand."

"You are not our lawmakers."

"Heretofore we have borne patiently with a hard neighborhood, but our Magister will be able to obtain justice."

"You will have your hands full with Mazovia."

"There are the Germans and the Roman Caesar behind the Magister."

"And to back me, there is the King of Poland, who rules more lands and people than all of you together."

"Does your highness wish to fight the Order?"

"If I wished war I would not wait for you to come to Mazovia, but would attack you. But do not threaten, for I am not afraid."

"What, then shall be our answer to the Magister?"

"Your Magister did not ask any questions. Answer what you wish."

"Then we ourselves will avenge and punish."

In answer to this, the prince stretched his hand and shook his finger in the very face of the Crusader.

"Take care!" said he, in a voice choked with rage. "Take care! I permitted you to challenge Yurand, but if you should break into my lands with the soldiers of the Order, then I, too, will attack you, and you will be next brought here as prisoner, and not as guest."

His patience was apparently exhausted, for he violently threw his cap on the table, and, leaving the room, slammed the door behind him.

The Crusaders became pale with rage, and De Fursi seemed to be stunned.

"What now?" asked brother Rotger.

Hugo de Dansfeldt sprang toward De Fursi with clenched fists.

"Why did you say that we were the first to attack Yurand?"

"Because it is true!"

"You should have lied."

"I came here to fight, not to lie."

"You have shown fight, indeed!"

"And did you not run yourself from Yurand?"

"Pax!" said De Loewe. "This knight is the guest of the Order."

"What difference does it make what he said," brother Gottfried interfered. "Yurand could not be punished without a trial, and in court everything would be cleared up."

"What now?" repeated brother Rotger.

There was a moment of silence. Then the stern and harsh voice of De Loewe was heard.

"It is necessary, once for all, to settle with that bloodthirsty cur?" he said. "De Bergow must be released. We will gather the garrisons of Stchitna, Inspuk, Lubow and the nobility of Chelm and attack Yurand. It is time we had done with him."

But the shrewd Dansfeldt, who could look at everything from two sides, placed both hands on his head, frowned, and after thinking a while, said:

"Without the permission of the Magister, we cannot——"

"If we are successful, the Magister will praise us," said brother Gottfried.

"And what if we do not succeed—if the prince moves his lancers against us?"

"He will not—there is peace between him and the Order."

"I admit there is peace, but we will be the first to break it. Our garrisons could not withstand an assault of the Mazovii."

"Then the Magister will take our part, and there will be war."

Dansfeldt again frowned and began to reflect.

"No, no!" he said, finally. If we are successful, the Magister, in his soul, will be glad. Envoys will be sent to the prince, who will make agreements with him, and we will escape punishment. But in case of failure, the Order will not take our part, and will not declare war against the prince. It would take a different Magister to do that. The prince is backed by the King of Poland, with whom the Magister will not quarrel."

"At all events, we have the Dobrzhinsk land; hence, we do not fear Cracow."

"Yes, because there was hope——. We took it in pledge, as it were——. And even then——"

He looked around, and lowering his voice, added:

"I have heard at Malborg that if war were declared against us, we would only have to return the land."

"Ah!" said brother Rotger, "if there were among us a Marquart Zaltzbach, or a Schombert, who strangled Withold's cubs, they would be able to master Yurand. And Withold was the viceroy of Yagella, and grand duke, and yet Schombert escaped punishment. He strangled Withold's children, and that was the end of it. We really lack men with ready wit."

When Hugo heard this he leaned his elbows on the table, his head resting on his hands, and began to muse. His eyes began to glisten, and wiping his moist lips with his hand, he said:

"Blessed be the moment when our pious brother thought of the name of the brave Schombert!"

"Why? Have you found a remedy?" asked De Loewe.

"Speak quickly!" cried the brethren Rotger and Gottfried.

"Listen!" said Hugo. "Yurand's only daughter is here, whom he loves and guards like the apple of his eye."

"Yes. We know her! She is also beloved by the princess."

"Yes. Now, if we carried away this girl, not only would he exchange Bergow for her, but would give up all the prisoners, surrender himself, and give us Spichow to boot."

"By the blood of Saint Boniface, spilled at Dokhum!" cried brother Gottfried. "If it were only as you say!"

They became silent, as if frightened by the boldness and the

difficulties of the undertaking. Finally, brother Rotger turned to Zigfried de Loewe.

"Your mind and experience are equal to your bravery," he said. "What do you think of it?"

"I think that the thing is worth considering."

"You see," continued Rotger, "the girl stands near to the princess, who loves her like her own child."

And Hugo de Dansfeldt began to laugh.

"You said yourself," he remarked, "that Schomberg killed or strangled Withold's cubs; and what was the result? They made a noise about all sorts of trifles, but if we send Yurand in chains to the Magister, instead of punishing him, he will surely reward us."

"Yes," said De Loewe; "there is a good opportunity of carrying it out. The prince is departing and Anna Danuta remains here with the court ladies only. To attack the prince's court in times of peace would be an unimportant affair. The prince's court is not Spichow. The result would be the same as at Zlotaria—complaints would be sent to all the kingdoms and the Pope of the outrages committed by the Order; the cursed Yagello would make threats, and the Magister—you know him—would be glad to grab everything that could be grabbed, but would avoid a conflict with Yagello. Yes, there would be a hue and cry raised throughout the Polish and Mazovian countries!"

"And meantime, Yurand's body would have time to dry up on the hook," answered brother Hugo. "But who told you that she must be stolen from here?"

"You would not have her stolen from Tzechanow, where, besides the court retinue, there are three hundred archers?"

"No. But may not Yurand become ill and dispatch servants after his daughter? The princess would not oppose her going; and if the girl should be lost on the way, no one could tell that you or I stole her!"

"Oh!" said De Loewe, with impatience. "Arrange it so that Yurand shall get ill and send for his daughter."

Hugo smiled triumphantly and answered:

"I know a gilder, who has been banished from Malborg for some crime, and now resides at Stchitna. He can make any seal. Then I have people who, though our subjects, are Mazovii by birth. Do you understand me?"

"We do!" exclaimed brother Gottfried warmly.

And Rotger raised his hands and said:

"May God send you happiness, pious brother; for neither Marquart, Zalzbach nor Schomberg could find a better method



He blinked as if looking at something in the distance, and continued:

"I can see Yurand standing at the gate of Malborg, and being kicked by our soldiers——"

"And the girl will remain the servant of the Order," added Hugo.

On hearing this, De Loewe cast a stern glance at Dansfeldt, who pressed his finger upon his lip to denote the necessity of silence and caution, and then said:

"And now on to Stchitna, as soon as possible!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

Before departing, the four brethren and De Fursi went to take leave of the prince and princess. The leavetaking was not, of course, very friendly; yet, the prince, following the old Polish custom, presented each with a marten skin and a silver grivna; and they, as monks who were vowed to a life of poverty, promised not to keep the money for themselves, but to distribute it among the poor, who would be told to pray for the health, glory and salvation of the prince's soul. The Mazovii smiled quietly while listening to this assurance, for they well knew the greediness of the monks, and the deceitfulness of the Crusaders. "As the coward breathes, so the Crusader lies," had become a proverb in Mazovia. While Siegfried de Loewe was kissing the hand of the princess, Hugo de Danefeldt approached Danusia, placed his hand on her head, and said:

"We were commanded to pay good for evil, and even to love our enemies; therefore, we will send here a nun with healing balsam."

"How shall I reward you?" answered Danusia.

"Be the friend of the Order and its monks."

De Fursi was struck with the beauty of the girl, and when they were on the way to Stchitna, he asked:

"Who is that beautiful court lady to whom you spoke before departure?"

"It is the daughter of Yurand."

De Fursi was surprised.

"The one we are to carry away?"

"Yes. And when we have stolen her, Yurand will be ours."

"It seems not all is bad that comes from Yurand. It is worth while being a guard of such a prisoner."

"Think you it will be easier to fight her than Yurand?"

"I think the same as you. The father is an enemy of the Order, and yet you have lavished honeyed words on his daughter, and have promised her balsam."

Hugo de Danefeldt apparently thought it necessary to justify himself before Siegfried de Loewe, who was not better than others, it is true, but who, nevertheless, held to strict principles, and often attacked his brethren for their shortcomings.

"I promised her balsam," answered Hugo, "for that young knight who was crushed by the bull, and to whom she is affianced. If an outcry is made over her disappearance, we will say, that not only did we not intend to harm her, but have even sent her medicines from a feeling of Christian compassion."

"Very well," said De Loewe. We must have a reliable person."

"I will send a pious woman, who is devoted, body and soul, to the Order. I will command her to look and listen. When our men arrive, as though from Yurand, they will find everything ready."

"It will be hard to pick out such men."

"No. Our people speak the same language; besides, there are in the city, among the servants and in the garrison, people who fled from Mazovia—murderers and highwaymen, it is true, but they do not fear anything. If they succeed, they are rewarded; if they fail, they are hanged."

"And what if they betray you?"

"They will not, because there are death sentences hanging over their heads in Mazovia. It is only necessary to dress them in a manner to resemble Yurand's men, but the principal thing is the letter with Yurand's seal."

"We must guard against their meeting Yurand," said brother Rotger, "who is likely to come to Tzechanow to complain against us and defend himself, after the last conflict. At Tzechanow he would go to the small castle to see his daughter, and our men, coming after his daughter, might meet him there."

"I will choose rascals who know this business. They will know that to meet Yurand would be to meet their death. It will be important for them not to meet him."

"And yet they may all be caught, perchance."

"We will then disclaim any connection with them. Finally, if the girl is not carried away, there will be no alarm; and if a few dozen Mazovii are quartered, the Order will not be the loser."

Here brother Gottfried, the youngest of the monks, said:

"I cannot understand why you should fear the disclosure that the girl was stolen at our command. When she is in our hands, it will be necessary to send some one to Yurand and let him know that we hold her a prisoner, and that we demand, in return for her surrender, the release of De Bergow and the surrender of himself. How else? But then it will become known that she was stolen at our command."

"That is true!" said De Fursi, who was displeased with the entire affair. "Why should we hide that which must become known?"

But Hugo de Danefeldt began to laugh, and, turning to brother Gottfried, he asked:

"How long have you been wearing the cloak?"

"It will be six years next Trinity Sunday."

"When you have worn it six years longer, you will better understand the affairs of the Order. Yurand knows us better than you. He will be told that his daughter is in the hands of brother Schomberg, and that if he says one word, she will be sent to keep company with Withold's children——"

"And then?"

"Then De Bergow will be released, and the Order will be rid of Yurand."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed brother Rotger; "everything is arranged with such wisdom that God must bless the undertaking."

"God blesses all affairs which aim to benefit the Order," said the gloomy Siegfried de Loewe.

They proceeded on their way in silence. At a distance of two or three arrow shots before them their retinues were clearing the road of the snow that had fallen the previous night. A thick hoar-frost covered the trees; the day was gloomy, but warm, so that the horses were steaming. From the woods flocks of crows were flying toward human habitations, filling the air with their sinister croaking.

De Fursi was riding a little behind the Crusaders, rapt in deep meditation. He had been the guest of the Crusaders a number of years, and had joined in their attacks on Jhmud, where he distinguished himself by his great bravery. Having been received by the Crusaders as they only knew how to receive foreign knights, and possessing no means of his own, he was intent on joining their ranks. Meanwhile, he lived in Malborg, visiting various commanderies in search of recreation. Having arrived at Lubow, together with the rich De Bergow, and hearing of Yurand, he began to burn with a desire to join battle with the man of whom such terrible rumors were afloat,

The arrival of Maineger, who came out victorious from all combats, hastened the fatal meeting.

The commander of Lubow assigned them a retinue, but he told them so much of the ferocity, the craftiness and the treachery of Yurand, that when the latter demanded that they send away their retinue they refused, fearing that in that case he would attack them and either kill them or throw them into the Spichow dungeons. Then Yurand, thinking that they were bent on robbery and not on fighting, suddenly fell upon them and wrought terrible havoc among them.

De Fursi saw De Bergow lying on the ground beside his horse; he saw Maineger with a piece of a spear head in his abdomen; saw people vainly begging for mercy; he himself escaped with great difficulty, and for several days had wandered in the woods, and would surely have fallen a prey to wild beasts or died of hunger had he not accidentally wandered into Tzechanow, where he met Gottfried and Rotger.

This adventure left him with a feeling of abasement, shame, hatred, a thirst for revenge, and a deep feeling of commiseration for De Bergow, who was his friend. He therefore willingly joined in the complaint of the knights of the Order, when they sought to have the guilty one punished, and to obtain the release of De Bergow. But when reparation was denied, he would have consented, at first, to the use of any means calculated to avenge the wrongs committed by Yurand. But now his conscience troubled him. While listening to the conversations of the monks, and especially to what was said by Hugo de Danefeldt, he was repeatedly struck with wonder. During his few years' acquaintance with the Crusaders, he came to know them to be different from what they were considered in the west and among the Germans; but he also had met at Malborg some just and pious knights, who themselves had often complained of the corruption of their brethren, of their depravity, and De Fursi felt that they were right, but not being very scrupulous himself, he was not inclined to judge them strictly, the more so that the Crusaders' shortcomings were generally redeemed by their prowess and bravery. He had seen them at Wilno, face to face with the Polish knights, when they were conquering the castles defended with a superhuman obstinacy by the Polish garrisons; he had seen them falling under the blows of the ax and sword, in the storming of castles and in single combat. With the Lithuanians they had dealt mercilessly and ferociously, but at the same time were as brave as lions, and the rays of glory surrounded them like a sun. But now it seemed to De Fursi that a knight's soul ought to

shrink from the methods proposed by Hugo de Danefeldt, and yet the other brethren had not only failed to protest, but even acquiesced in the conspiracy. Thus his wonder grew apace; and now he was meditating whether it was proper for him to have a hand in the affair.

If it were merely a question of stealing the girl, and exchanging her for De Bergow, he would, perhaps, have consented, although he was affected by the beauty of Danusia. If he had to guard her, he would not object to it, and was not even sure, in that case, that she would remain the same girl after she had left him. But to the Crusaders that was of no importance. By her aid they wished to release De Bergow and overcome Yurand; to promise that if he surrendered himself, his daughter should be released, then to kill him, and, to hide the crime, to also kill the girl. Was she not threatened with the fate of Withold's children if Yurand should complain?

"They do not intend to keep their word," De Fursi said to himself, "but to delude both, to destroy both; yet, they wear crosses, and should be more honorable than others." And he became more and more indignant as he reflected upon such shamelessness. But he decided to verify his suspicions, so he again caught up with Danefeldt and asked:

"And if Yurand should surrender himself, would you release the girl?"

"If we released her, the entire world would see that we had betrayed them both," answered Danefeldt.

"What, then, would you do with her?"

In answer to this question Danefeldt leaned over to the speaker and smiled, disclosing his loathsome teeth.

"You mean to ask what we will do with her before or after his surrender?"

But De Fursi, knowing already what he had wished to know, became silent, and for some time seemed to be struggling with himself; then he raised himself a little in his stirrups and began, in a voice so loud that all four monks could hear him:

"Our pious brother, Ulrich von Jungingen, who is a model of, and adorns knighthood, told me once that among the old men of Malborg one may find yet a knight worthy of wearing a cross, but that those living in the frontier commanderies only bring shame upon the Order."

"We are all sinners, but we serve the Saviour," answered Hugo.

"Have you no honor? The Saviour is not served by dishonest acts. I tell you that not only will I not aid you, but I will prevent your carrying out your plan."

"What will you prevent?"

"I will prevent treachery, deceit and disgrace."

"How can you prevent us? In the battle with Yurand you lost your retinue and wagons. You are existing only by the favor of the Order, and you will starve if we do not give you bread. Besides, you are one, and we are four—how, then, can you prevent us?"

"How?" repeated De Fursi. "I can return and warn the prince. I can proclaim your intentions to the world."

The brethren exchanged looks, and in a moment their faces became distorted. Hugo de Danefeldt looked long and searchingly into the face of Siegfried de Loewe, then turned to De Fursi.

"Your ancestors served the Order," he said, "and you wished to join it, but we do not receive traitors."

"And I do not wish to serve with traitors."

"You will not carry out your threat! You know that the Order can punish, not monks alone——"

De Fursi, whom these words had angered, unsheathed his sword, with his left hand took hold of the point, and, with the handle in his right hand, said:

"By this hilt, which represents a cross, by the head of Saint Dyonisius, my patron saint, and on my honor as a knight, I swear that I will warn the Prince of Mazovia and the Magister!"

Hugo de Danefeldt again looked searchingly at Siegfried, who dropped his eyelids as if assenting to something.

Danefeldt then said in a strangely altered voice:

"Saint Dyonisius could himself carry his severed head, but if your head should fall——"

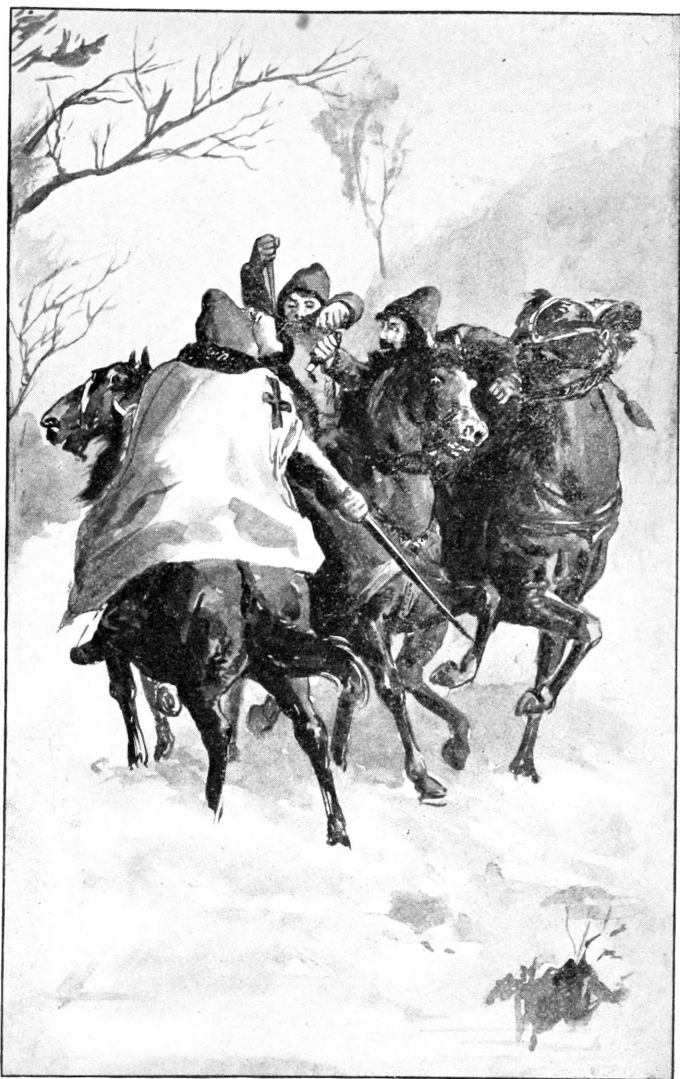
"You threaten me?" interrupted De Fursi.

"No; but we kill!" answered Danefeldt, and struck him with a knife with such force that it entered his body to the very hilt.

De Fursi uttered a fearful shriek, and for a moment attempted to grasp his sword with his right hand, but it fell to the ground, and at the same moment all three brethren halted and mercilessly began to thrust their swords into his neck, breast and abdomen, until he fell from the horse.

For a moment there was silence. De Fursi, bleeding from several dozen wounds, began to writhe in the snow, convulsively clutching it with his hands, but from the leaden sky only the croaking of ravens was heard.

"The people did not see us!" said Danefeldt in a halting voice.



"'No! but we kill,' answered Danefeldt, and struck him with a knife."  
See page 242.





"No. The retinues are ahead of us. We cannot even see them," answered Loewe.

"Listen: This will be the cause of a new complaint. We will report that the Mazovian knights attacked us and killed our companion. We will raise a hue and cry that will be heard in Malborg, that the prince's guests were attacked by murderers. Listen: It is necessary to say that the prince not only would not give ear to our complaints against Yurand, but ordered the complainant to be killed."

At that moment De Fursi turned on his back in his last convulsion, and lay motionless, with bloody foam on his lips and terror in his sightless but wide open eyes. Brother Rotger looked at him and said:

"Look, pious brethren, how God punishes only an intention of treachery."

"What we have done is for the good of the Order," answered Gottfried. "Glory to those——"

But he cut short his speech, for behind them, at that moment, appeared, from a turn of the road, a horseman, running at full speed. Seeing him, Hugo de Danefeldt hurriedly exclaimed:—

"Whoever it may be, he must die!"

And De Loewe, although the oldest of them, had a very keen sight.

"I recognize him," he said; "it is the armor-bearer who killed the bull with an ax."

"Get your swords ready, that he may be taken unawares," said Danefeldt. "I will strike first, and you follow me."

The Czech meantime approached, and when about six or eight feet from the Crusaders, stopped his horse. He saw the body in a pool of blood, the riderless horse, and surprise was depicted on his face, but it lasted only a moment. He immediately turned to the brethren, as if he had seen nothing, and said:

"I salute you, mighty knights!"

"We recognize you," answered Danefeldt, slowly approaching. "What would you of us?"

"I was sent by Zbishko of Bogdanetz, who was hurt by the bull at the chase. He could not come himself."

"What does your master wish of us?"

"Because you have unjustly blamed Yurand of Spichow, making aspersion on his honor as a knight, my master commanded me to tell you that you have not acted like true knights, but like curs; and whichever of you does not like these words, him he challenges to combat, on horse or on foot, until

the last breath. He will be ready for the combat as soon as, with God's help, he recovers."

"Tell your master that the knights of the Order will patiently bear the insults for the sake of our Saviour, but that they cannot accept the challenge without permission from the Magister or the Grand Marshal. We shall send to Malborg for this permission."

The Czech again looked at the body of De Fursi, because he was sent principally to him. Zbishko knew that the monks did not fight, but having heard that there was a secular knight among them, he wished to challenge him, thinking that he would thereby pacify Yurand, and gain him over to himself. And there was the knight, slaughtered like an ox, among four Crusaders.

The Czech did not know what had transpired, but being from childhood habituated to all sorts of dangers, he now suspected treachery. He was also surprised that Danefeldt, while speaking to him, gradually came closer to him, and the rest began to approach him from all sides, as if desiring to surround him unnoticed. He was therefore on the alert, especially as, in the haste of his departure, he had forgotten to take weapons with him. And Danefeldt was approaching closer and closer.

"I promised your master a healing balsam, and he ill repays me for the kind act. However, it is always thus with the Polanders. But as he is dangerously wounded, and may soon appear before God, you tell him——"

And with his left hand he leaned on the shoulder of the Czech.

"You tell him that this is my answer!!"

And at that very moment a knife gleamed at the throat of the Czech, who had long been watching his movements.

Seizing the right hand of the Crusader with his iron hands, the Czech bent and turned it so that the bones cracked. And as he heard the fearful cry of suffering, he turned his horse and dashed away before the others could block his way.

Rotger and Gottfried attempted to overtake him, but frightened by the cries of Danefeldt, they returned. De Loewe was supporting him; and he, with pale face, which was turning blue, cried so loudly that the retinues, considerably in advance of them, stopped their horses.

Danefeldt was apparently unable to keep on his horse, and presently cold perspiration covered his forehead, and he became unconscious.

He was placed on a wagon and hurried to the frontier, De Loewe fearing to linger after all that had happened. From

time to time De Loewe rubbed his face with snow, but it was impossible to bring him to consciousness. It was only when they had reached the frontier that Danefeldt opened his eyes and looked around as if in wonder.

"How do you feel?" asked De Loewe.

"I feel no pain, but I do not feel my hand," answered Danefeldt.

"Because it is benumbed. That is why you feel no pain. In a warm room the pain will return. Meantime, thank the Lord for the momentary relief."

Rotger and Gottfried immediately approached the wagon.

"What a misfortune!" exclaimed the former. "What shall we do now?"

"We will say," answered Danefeldt in a weak voice, "that the armor-bearer killed De Fursi."

"Another crime of theirs, and the guilty one is known!" added Rotger.

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## CHAPTER VII.

The Czech had meantime returned to the forest castle, where he found the prince, and to him he first related what had happened. Luckily, there were courtiers present who saw the armor-bearer depart without weapons. One of them even called after him and jestingly told him to take some weapons with him lest the Germans give him a good thrashing; but the Czech, fearing that he might be unable to overtake them, sprang on his horse with only a fur coat on him, and dashed away. These witnesses dissipated all doubt in the prince's mind as to who could have been the murderer of De Fursi. And he was filled with such wrath that he wished to pursue them in order to deliver them in chains to the Magister. But on second thought he saw the impossibility of overtaking them before they reached the frontier.

"I will at least send a letter to the Magister," he said, "that he may know what they have done. The Order is in a bad way; formerly there was some discipline, and now every commander considers himself the head of the Order. It is the will of God, but there will be a reckoning."

He began to reflect; then turning to the courtiers, he said:

"I cannot understand why they killed their guest. Were it not that the Czech had departed unarmed, I would suspect him."

The priest Wyshonok thinks it impossible for the Czech to

have attacked five armed men, even if he had been armed; and much less could he have done that, being unarmed. Besides, there were the armed retinues of the Crusaders.

"That is true," said the prince. "That guest probably dissented from them, and refused to lie as they wished him to. I saw even here how they winked to him to say that Yurand had been the aggressor."

"He must be a strong fellow to have put that dog's wrist out of joint," said Mrokota.

"He says that he heard the bones crack," answered the prince. "And, considering what he did in the forest, he may be believed. Apparently it is dangerous to trifle either with the master or his servant. Were it not for Zbishko, the aurochs would have charged the horses. And it is to De Lorche and to him that the princess owes her safety."

"Yes, there is no jesting with him," repeated the priest. "Although Zbishko can hardly breathe, he took the part of Yurand and challenged the Germans. That is the sort of son-in-law Yurand needs."

"I think he will give his consent now," said the prince.

"Christ has arranged it all," said the princess, who had entered and heard the end of the conversation. "Yurand cannot oppose Danusia's choice now, if God only grant Zbishko health. But we owe him a reward on our own part."

"The best reward for him would be Danusia; and I also think that he will get her, for even Yurand will not be able to withstand the onslaught of women."

"Nothing would please Zbishko more than a knight's girdle and golden spurs," said the princess.

The prince smiled good naturedly and answered:

"Let the girl herself take them to him; and when he recovers we will see that the knighthood is conferred according to custom. Meanwhile, let her take them to him immediately, for there is nothing so stimulating as sudden happiness."

The princess kissed him in the presence of the court, while he said:

"That was a good idea. The Holy Ghost was liberal to women in the matter of reason. Call the girl."

Zbishko was surprised when the insignia were placed before him by Danusia, and wondered how he could have deserved them. The prince, who with the princess had followed Danusia into Zbishko's room, told him that bravery does not go unrewarded, and that the girdle and spurs were given him in recognition of the courage displayed by him in the forest, regardless of his own safety.

Zbishko was overcome with emotion and could not speak, while the prince continued:

"I think that you know the duties of a knight, and that you are worthy of wearing the insignia. You must serve our Saviour and struggle against the lord of the infernal regions. You must faithfully serve the anointed sovereign, avoid unjust battles; you must defend the innocent; and may God help you!"

"Amen!" said the priest Wyshonok.

The prince rose, made the sign of the cross over Zbishko, and said:

"And when you have recovered, go direct to Tzechanow, whither I will also send Yurand."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

Three days afterward a woman arrived with the promised balsam, and with her came also the captain of the archers of Stchitna, who bore a letter, signed by the brethren and provided with the seal of Danefeldt, in which the Crusaders called on heaven and earth to witness the insults offered them in Mazovia, and under threat of God's vengeance demanded that the murderer of "our dear comrade and guest" be punished.

Danefeldt had dictated the letter, and his own complaint in respectful, but stern terms, and demanded that the Czech be sentenced to death. The prince tore the letter in the presence of the captain and threw it at his feet, saying:

"The Magister sent them here to come to an agreement with me, and they only roused my ire. Tell them, in my name, that they themselves killed their guest, and also attempted to kill the servant, the facts of which I will write to the Magister; and I will also add that he should choose other envoys if he wishes me not to take the side of the King of Cracow in case of war."

"My dear sir!" answered the captain, "must I take back only this answer to the powerful and pious brethren?"

"If that is not enough, then tell them that I consider them a canine brood, and not knights!" and that put an end to the conversation.

The captain departed, because the prince himself the same day went to Tzechanow. Only the "sister" remained, who had brought the balsam, which, however, Wyshonok did not permit to be used, especially since the sick youth had slept well the previous night, and rose the following morning very weak, but without fever.

After the departure of the prince the sister sent one of her servants for another remedy, "basilisk eggs," which, she asserted, would restore even the dying. She herself very humbly walked through the house, one of her arms hanging uselessly, and her dress, though secular, very much resembled that of a nun, with a rosary suspended from her belt. She spoke good Polish, and inquired with great solicitude about Zbishko and Danusia, to whom on one occasion she gave a Jericho rose. On the following day, when Zbishko was asleep, and the girl was in the dining hall, she seated herself near her and said:

"May God bless you! After my prayer, last night, I dreamt that through the falling snow two knights were coming to you; one of them approached you first and covered you with a white cloak, and the other said: 'I only see snow, but I do not see her,' and turned back."

Danusia, who was sleepy, opened her blue eyes and asked:

"What is the meaning of it?"

"The meaning of it is that he who loves you best will get you."

"That is Zbishko!" answered the girl.

"I do not know, because I did not see the speaker's face; I only saw the cloak. Then I woke up, because our Lord Jesus Christ sends me pain in my legs every night, and of the use of my arm He has deprived me entirely."

"And did not the balsam help you?"

"The balsam will not help me, because I was punished for a grievous sin. If you wish to know what sin, I will tell you."

Danusia nodded her head, and the sister continued:

"There are in the Order women servants who, though they take no vow, and can marry, are, nevertheless, bound to perform duties which are assigned to them by the brethren. And the one that is worthy of such favor and honor, receives a pious kiss from a brother knight as a sign that from that moment she must serve the Order with word and deed. Ah! And I was to be worthy of the great honor; but, in my hardened sinfulness, instead of receiving it, I grievously sinned, and have incurred punishment."

"What have you done?"

"Brother Danefeldt came and kissed me, and I, thinking that it was mere licentiousness, raised my hand against him."

And she began to beat her breast and repeat:

"Lord, be merciful! I have sinned!"

"And what happened?" asked Danusia.

"My hand was immediately paralyzed, and I have been a cripple ever since. I was young and foolish, and did not know,

and yet the punishment did not escape me. Because, even if it should appear to a woman that a brother of the Order wishes to do something bad, she must leave it to the judgment of God, and must not resist, for whoever resists the Order or a brother in the Cross, will be stricken by the wrath of God."

Danusia listened with grief and fear, and the sister began to sigh and continued:

"I am not old yet," she said; "I am scarcely thirty; but God has deprived me of my youth and beauty as well as my arm."

"If it were not for your arm," answered Danusia, "you would have nothing to complain of."

Then there was silence. Suddenly the sister, as if recalling something, said:

"Why, I dreamed that some knight covered you with a white cloak. Perhaps it was a Crusader. They, too, wear white cloaks."

"I do not want Crusaders or their cloaks!" answered the girl.

Their further conversation was interrupted by Wyshonok, who, on entering the room, nodded to Danusia, and said:

"Thank God, and go to Zbishko. He is awake and wishes to eat. He has considerably improved."

And so it really was. Zbishko felt much improved, and the priest Wyshonok thought that he would recover, when an unexpected occurrence upset all calculations and shattered all hopes.

People came from Yurand with a letter to the princess in which was conveyed the most dreadful news. A part of Yurand's castle in Spichow had been burned, and in trying to save the people, he had been crushed by a falling beam. The priest Kaleb, who wrote in Yurand's name, added that Yurand might recover, but that the fire had so burned his eyes, that he could hardly see, and was threatened with complete blindness.

For that reason Yurand wished his daughter to hasten to Spichow, as he wished to see her again before darkness enveloped him entirely. He also said that from that moment she must remain by his side, for all blind men who depend upon the charity of others always have a little boy at their side, and why should he not have that consolation, instead of dying amid strangers? He also thanked the princess, who had reared the girl like a mother; and wound up by saying, that though blind, he should come to Warsaw to fall at the feet of the princess and implore her to continue to be kind to Danusia in the future.

When the priest Wyshonok had read the letter, the princess

was for some time unable to utter a word. She had hoped that Yurand, who usually visited his child five or six times a year, would come for the nearest holidays; and she, with the aid of Prince Yanoush, would persuade him to consent to the wedding. And now this letter not only thwarted the fulfillment of her intentions, but would deprive her of Danusia, whom she loved as if she were her own child.

It occurred to her that Yurand might immediately marry his daughter to one of his neighbors, so that he could pass the remainder of his days among his kindred. To send Zbishko to Spichow was out of the question, since his ribs were just beginning to heal; and finally, who could tell how he would be received at Spichow? Had not Yurand told her that for some mysterious reason he could not give Danusia to Zbishko?

While thus reflecting, she sent for the oldest of Yurand's men to inquire of the misfortune at Spichow, and at the same time to learn something about his intentions.

She was surprised when, at her call, a perfect stranger entered, and not the old Tolima, who had always carried Yurand's cuirass, and usually came with him. But the man told her that Talima had been dangerously wounded in the last conflict with the Germans, and was now hovering between life and death, and that Yurand was quite ill, and wished his daughter to return as soon as possible, because his sight was growing weaker, and that perhaps in two days he would be entirely blind.

The emissary persistently begged that the girl might be given to him as soon as the horses had rested. As it was getting late, the princess resisted, but principally because Zbishko's and Danusia's and her own heart would break at the sudden separation.

Zbishko lay on his bed like one dazed, when the princess entered his room, and, wringing her hands, said:

"Nothing can be done, because he is her father!"

"Nothing can be done," Zbishko repeated like an echo, and closed his eyes like one who feels death approaching.

He did not die, although his heart was oppressed with still greater grief, and still gloomier thoughts flashed in his head, as clouds, driven by the wind, obscure the bright sunlight and extinguish all joy in the world. Zbishko, like the princess, understood that if Danusia went to Spichow she would be lost to him. Here everybody was friendly toward him, but there Yurand might refuse to receive him, or listen to him, especially as he was bound by an oath, or something as im-



portant as an oath. Besides, how could he go to Spichow when he could hardly turn in his bed?

A few days ago, when by the grace of the prince he had received the golden spurs and knight's girdle, he thought that his happiness would overcome his illness, and prayed with all his soul that he might rise and try conclusions with the Crusaders; but now he again lost all hope, for he felt that, with the departure of Danusia, all desire to live, all strength to struggle with death, would disappear.

The holidays were approaching, and the happiness and the light that filled the room when Danusia was present would be gone. What happiness it had been to ask her several times a day, "Do you love me?" and to see her cover her laughing and confused eyes, and, stooping, answer, "Whom but Zbishko do I love?" And now only the illness and grief would remain, and happiness would be gone, never to return.

Zbishko's eyes filled with tears, which rolled down his cheeks. He turned to the princess and said:

"My gracious lady, I think I shall never see Danusia again."

And the princess, herself saddened, answered:

"Yes, it were not surprising if you died of grief. But the Lord Jesus Christ is merciful." But, desiring to encourage him somewhat, she added: "If Yurand should die before you the guardianship would pass to the prince and myself, and we would immediately give her to you."

"A long time must elapse ere he will die!" answered Zbishko; and then, as if a new thought crossed his mind, he raised himself in bed, and in a changed voice said: "Gracious lady!—"

But he was interrupted by Danusia running into the room with tears in her eyes.

"So you already know it?" she said. "Oh, how sorry I am for papa! But I am also sorry for you!"

Zbishko then began to implore the princess to call the priest Wyshonok, and marry them there and then, saying that, though Yurand were angry, he would have to submit to the superior law of God, and that Danusia might then go to Spichow, since no human power could deprive him of her. Besides, it could not then be said that Yurand had broken his vow, for it would not be through his fault that they were married—that nothing could be done against the will of God.

The princess, after some hesitation, sent for the priest Wyshonok, who, on hearing what was demanded of him, made the sign of the cross and said:

"In the name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost! How can I do it now? It is Lent!"

"My God! It is true!" exclaimed the princess.

The priest, not without resource, thought that if he could obtain a special dispensation, and with the consent of the prince and princess, the difficulties would be removed. If Bishop James, of Kurdwanow, were here, he might grant the dispensation, although he was very strict, and not like his predecessor, Bishop Mampholius, whose answer to every request was, "Very well! Very well!"

"Bishop James loves the prince and myself," said the princess.

"Wherefore I think he would grant it. There are reasons for it: the girl must depart, and the youth is ill and may not recover—H'm! in articulo mortis!— But without the dispensation it is impossible."

The princess vouched that the bishop would not refuse it afterward. The priest, who was a mild and kind hearted man, said:

"The promise of God's anointed is a great promise. I fear the bishop, but there is the promise! That youth, too, might promise something to the Plotzk Cathedral. However, until the dispensation comes, it will be a sin—my sin, and not any of yours. H'm! It is true, Christ is merciful, and He forgives those who sin out of pay for other's woes; but it will be a sin. And what if the bishop should be obstinate? Who will remit my sin?"

"The bishop will not be obstinate!" exclaimed the princess.

"That man Sauderus, who arrived with me, has sample indulgences," said Zbishko.

The priest probably had little faith in the indulgences of Sauderus, but was glad to have some excuse to come to the aid of Zbishko and Danusia, whom he had known and loved from her childhood. The worst that could happen, he thought, would be to undergo some penance in church, hence he turned to the princess and said:

"I am a priest, but I am also a servant of the prince. What do you, gracious lady, command me?"

"I do not wish to command, I only ask," answered the princess. "But if that Sauderus has indulgences——"

"Sauderus has, but the trouble is with the bishop. He is at Plotzk, with the synod, passing strict canons."

"Do not fear the bishop. I have heard that he prohibited the bearing of swords and bows, but he never prohibited good deeds."

The priest raised his hands to heaven.

"Then be it as you will."

The hearts of all were gladdened. Zbishko again raised himself on his bed, while the princess, Danusia and Wyshonok began to confer on what was to be done. They decided to keep it secret, so that Yurand should not know of the wedding until the princess told him of it at Tzechanow. In the meantime the priest was to write to Yurand, telling him to come to Tzechanow at once, as there were better means of curing sickness at the latter place, and where he would not grieve in solitude. And, finally, it was decided that Zbishko and Danusia should forthwith make their confessions, and the wedding take place at night, when everybody had retired.

Zbishko intended the Czech to be a witness of the marriage, but when he recalled that the Czech had been given to him by Yagenka, he changed his mind. For a moment it seemed to him that he saw her standing before him, with purple cheeks and tear-filled eyes, and calling in an imploring voice: "Do not do it, Zbishko; do not return evil for good, and grief for my love!" And suddenly he was seized with great pity for her, for he felt that her grief would find no consolation either under her own roof, in the forest thickets, in the field, in the gifts of the abbot or in the sympathy of Pohetzlas and Walk. And he said in his soul to her: "May God send you prosperity. And though I am willing to move heaven and earth in your favor, I can do nothing for you." The conviction that he was powerless in the matter gave him consolation, and soon his composure returned, so that he began to think again of Danusia and the wedding.

The Czech was surprised when Zbishko ordered him to produce and dress him in his best clothes, saying that he wished to be prepared for confession and holy communion.

Noticing the anxiety of the Czech's face, Zbishko hastened to explain that such preparations were not necessarily made for death; that the holidays were approaching, and with the departure of the princess and her suite the nearest priest would be at Pryhasnysh, while his recovery was yet in the hands of God.

The Czech calmed down and dressed Zbishko in his gold embroidered white jacket, which he wore only on solemn occasions, covered the bed with a neat little coverlet, and arranged his long curls, which he tied with a red ribbon.

The princess could not think of marrying off her favorite ward without the customary white dress, garland and wine. She had no difficulty in finding Danusia's white dress, but when

she thought that there was not a flower or leaf to be obtained in the woods, she began to cry aloud. How could the wedding take place without a herd-of-grace garland?

Danusia was no less distressed than the princess, for she also considered the garland an important adjunct. She stood thoughtful for a moment, her hair hanging loosely over her shoulders, then pointed to the bunches of immortelles hanging on the walls of the room and said:

"We must weave a garland of these, at least. Zbishko will be proud of me in any garland."

Fearing an ill-omen, the princess would not consent at first, but as no other flowers were in the house, which was used only when the court went hunting, she finally decided to use the immortelles.

After supper the servants were ordered to retire. Yurand's emissaries disposed themselves in the servants' quarters and in the stables beside their horses. Darkness settled over all. The wood in the fireplace turned gray and cold, and finally a deathly stillness enveloped the forest house; only from time to time the dogs barked at the wolves in the forest. But from the windows of the princess, Wyshonok and Zbishko, the light cast a reddish shimmer on the snow-covered ground. They were awake, listening to the beating of their own hearts, and were agitated with the solemnity of the approaching moment.

At midnight the princess took Danusia by the hand and led her into Zbishko's room, where the priest, with crucifix in hand, was waiting for them. In the flickering light from the fireplace Zbishko noticed the pale face of the girl, dressed in white, with a garland of immortelles on her head, her hands hanging by her side, and she reminded him of some image he had seen in the church. He was wonder-struck when he saw her, and thought that he was about to marry some heavenly creature. This impression grew even stronger upon him when she, crossing her hands on her breast, dropped on her knees, and throwing back her head, closed her eyes.

He thought that she was dead, and an involuntary dread fell upon him. His alarm did not last long, however, for as he heard the words of the priest, "Ecce Agnus Dei," he became wrapped in meditation, and his thoughts turned to God.

The profound silence that reigned in the room was only broken by the solemn voice of the priest, "Domine, non sum dignus," the crackling of the wood in the fireplace, and the continuous singing of a cricket in a chink of the wall. Outside of the house the wind blew, the snow-covered forest roared, then suddenly became quiet.

The priest, thinking it better to have two witnesses, much to the surprise of those present, brought in De Lorche, who had sworn, on his honor and the relics, to keep the secret so long as it should be necessary.

De Lorche bent his knee before the princess, then before Danusia. Once more he stood erect, silent, in all his parade weapons, in the dents of which shone the reddish reflection of the fire, tall, motionless and full of amazement; for to him also the girl, dressed in white, with a garland of immortelles on her head, seemed the living embodiment of an angel whose picture he had seen in the window of a Gothic temple.

The priest placed Danusia at the bedside of Zbishko, and putting the stole over their hands, began to perform the marriage rites.

Copious tears flowed from the eyes of the princess, but there was no alarm in her soul, for she was convinced that her conduct was commendable in uniting these children—good, innocent children.

De Lorche again bent his knee, and, leaning with both hands on the hilt of his sword, he resembled a man who sees an apparition, while Zbishko and Danusia were repeating the words of the priest, "I take thee," slowly and sweetly repeated also by the cricket and the crackling of the fire wood.

The tenderness shown by the lovers toward each other so agitated De Lorche that he declared that he had never seen such gentle hearts, and therefore solemnly swore that he was ready to fight any knight, be he magician or dragon, who would stand in the way of their happiness. And he held up the cross-shaped hilt of a misericorde.

As it was necessary to keep awake till morning, the princess persuaded Danusia to repeat the ditty she had first sang at Tinetz in the presence of Zbishko; but she had scarcely gone through two stanzas, when her lips trembled and from under her eyelids a flood of tears coursed down her cheeks. She first attempted to check them, but was unable to do so, and finally she burst into sobs, as when she had last sung for Zbishko in the Cracow dungeon.

"Danusia! What is the matter, Danusia?" asked Zbishko.

"Why do you cry? What kind of wedding is this?" exclaimed the princess.

"I do not know," answered Danusia, sobbing. "I am so sad! I am so sorry—for Zbishko and you——"

They tried to console her, explaining that their separation would be short, and that she would surely come with Yurand to Tzechanow for the holidays. Zbishko embraced her, and

kissed the tears from her eyes, but a feeling of anguish and grief oppressed the hearts of everybody, and thus the hours were passing.

And now loud cries were heard from without, and everybody shuddered. The princess, rising from the bench, exclaimed:

"Why, they are taking the horses to water!"

Wyshonok looked out through the window, which was assuming a grayish tinge, and said:

"The night is paling, and the day is dawning. Ave Maria, gratias plena——"

Then he went out, and on returning, said:

"It is dawning, but it will be a gloomy day. Those were Yurand's people watering the horses. It is time for you to prepare for the road, poor girl."

The princess and Danusia burst into tears, and the two, with Zbishko, began to chant a prayer, in a long-drawn, monotonous chant common to the lower class when parting.

Zbishko ordered the Czech, who came to inquire about his health, to open the window, which he did, first covering his master with his own cloak, for it was cold without, and a thick layer of snow overspread the ground. Through the flying snow-flakes Zbishko could see the sleigh, surrounded by Yurand's men on horseback. They were all armed; some were in tatters which reflected the pale and gloomy light of the day. The forest was entirely hidden by the falling snow.

Danusia again ran into his room, already wrapped in a fur cloak, and again she threw herself on his neck.

"Although I am departing, I am yours!" she said.

And he kissed her hands, cheeks and eyes, which were barely visible under her fur hood, and said:

"May God protect you! You are mine—mine till death!"

And when she was again forced from his arms, he raised himself, and through the window saw the princess holding Danusia in her embrace; he saw the courtiers kissing her, and the priest blessing her and making the sign of the cross. Before departing, she again stretched her arms toward Zbishko, and shouted:

"God be with you, Zbishko!"

"May we meet at Tzechanow——"

But the air was so thick with snow flakes that it seemed as if it wished to cover everything and deaden all sounds, and the last words were so faint that it seemed to both that they came from a great distance.

END OF BOOK THREE.

## BOOK FOUR.

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### CHAPTER I.

After the heavy snowfall, cold, clear and dry weather set in. In the day the forests glimmered in the rays of the sun, the rivers were ice-bound, and the bogs were frozen. The nights were moonlit, and the frost was so keen that the trees in the forest crackled; the birds kept near the dwellings; the roads became dangerous on account of the wolves, which attacked not only travellers, but, gathering in packs, descended on the villages. But the people were happy, sitting near the fireplaces in their little huts, foreseeing a good harvest after the terrible winter, and gaily awaited the approaching holidays.

The forest castle of the prince was deserted, the princess, with Wyshonok, having left for Tzechanow. Zbishko, who had partially regained his strength, but not sufficiently to mount a horse, remained in the castle with his people, including Sauderus, the Czech, and the servants of the castle.

But the soul of Zbishko yearned for his young wife. It is true that the thought that no power on earth could deprive him of her afforded him some consolation; but, on the other hand, the same thought deepened his grief. For days he sighed and prayed for the hour when he should be able to leave the castle. He was considering the means to be employed by him in winning over Yurand. At times he lived through painful and alarming moments, but upon the whole the future seemed bright to him. To love Danusia, and search for helmets with peacock crests were all that he looked forward to in life. He often wished to confide the entire matter to the Czech, whom he learned to highly esteem, but the latter was faithful to Yagenka and did not willingly speak of Danusia, and, besides, he himself, being bound by the secret, could not tell him everything that had transpired.

A week before Christmas Eve he mounted a horse, and though he felt that he could not do it when armed, he nevertheless took courage, especially as he did not think that he would have occasion to resort to the cuirass and helmet in the near future. To kill time while at home, he attempted to raise his sword, in which he succeeded, but the ax was too heavy

for him; but he still thought that with both hands he would be able to handle it.

Two days before Christmas Eve he finally gave orders to prepare for the journey to Tzechanow. Just before his departure, seeing Sauderus packing his chests into one of the sleighs, he said:

"Why do you cling to me like a burr to the wool of sheep? You said that you were going to Prussia."

"Yes, I said that I was going to Prussia; but how can I start, with the snow lying so deep on the ground? The wolves would devour me before the rising of the first star, and I have nothing to do here. I would rather be in the city, and teach people piety, distribute holy wares among them, and save them from suggestions of the devil, as I vowed to do in Rome, to the holy father of Christendom. Besides, I am strongly attached to your grace; wherefore I shall not leave you until the very day of my leaving for Rome, for I may, perchance, be useful to you."

"He is always ready to drink and eat for your health, master," said the Czech, "and such service he is particularly glad to render; but if wolves should attack us at Prjhasnysh, we will throw him to them, for he is fit for nothing better."

"Look to it, now, that your sinful words do not freeze to your lips," retorted Sauderus, "for such icicles melt only in hell-fire."

"Oh, yes!" said Glawa, stroking with his mittened hand his barely visible mustache. "At the first stopping place I will heat some beer, but you shall have none of it."

"But it is said in holy writ, 'Appease the thirsty!' There you have sinned again!"

"Then I will give you a pail of water; meantime, take that!" saying which, he took a handful of snow and threw it at the beard of Sauderus, but the latter dodged it and said:

"Why should you go to Tzechanow? Here we have already a trained bear who throws snow with his paws."

Thus they disputed, but, upon the whole, they were attached to each other. However, Zbishko did not forbid Sauderus to travel with his suite, for the man amused him and seemed really attached to him.

They left the castle early on a bright morning. The snow lay very deep, and it was necessary to cover the horses with caparisons. From under the snow the roofs of huts protruded, and in places the smoke seemed to come from the bare snow drifts and rose toward the sky, rose tinted by the morning



twilight, first in a straight column, then spreading like the crest on a knight's helmet.

Zbishko lay in a wagon on a couch of straw and furs, in order to preserve his strength and the better to protect himself against the cold. Glawa sat beside him, with his bow ready for use in case they were attacked by wolves. Meanwhile, they chatted merrily.

"We will stop at Prjhasnysh long enough to feed our horses and warm ourselves; then we will go forward."

"To Tzechanow?"

"First to Tzechanow, to pay our respect to the prince and princess, and hear divine service."

"And then?" asked Glawa.

"Then—who knows? Perhaps to Bogdanetz."

The Czech looked at him with surprise. It occurred to him that perhaps his master had renounced the daughter of Yurand, which seemed to him the more likely since the girl had departed, and it had been rumored that Yurand was not favorably disposed toward the young knight. The armor-bearer found consolation in the thought, because he loved Yagenka, and looked upon her as upon a heavenly star, and was ready to purchase her happiness with his life-blood. By this time the noble qualities of Zbishko had won his high regard, and he wished to serve them both till death.

"Then your grace will remain on the estate?" he asked with delight.

"How could I remain there," answered Zbishko, "when I must challenge to single combat the Crusaders, and, first of all, Lichtenstein? De Lorche said that the Magister intends to invite the King of Thoru. When he comes, I will in some way join the king's suite, and Zawisha of Gorbow or Powalo of Tatchew will obtain from our master permission for me to fight these monks. They will probably wish to meet us with their armor-bearers, so you will have something to do."

"I would like to become a monk myself, if it were not for your determination," said the Czech.

Zbishko looked at him with approbation.

"The man will fare ill who comes in contact with your spear. Christ has gifted you with considerable strength, but it would not be well for you to boast of it, for it is more becoming a true armor-bearer to be modest."

The Czech corroboratingly nodded his head.

"The old master will be glad," he said in a little while, "and they will be glad at Zgojhelitzl, too."

And suddenly Yagenka appeared to Zbishko as distinctly as

if he beheld her in the sleigh in front of him. That happened always when he suddenly thought of her.

"No!" he said to himself. "She will not be glad, because if I return to Bogdanetz, it will be with Danusia. Yagenka must choose some one else." Here Walk and Phetzlas passed before his eyes, and he became sad at the thought that the girl must fall into the hands of one of them. "It would be better if she could find a third suitor," he thought. "The two who are now pestering her with their attentions are drunkards and impostors, and utterly unworthy of a good girl like her." He also thought that when his uncle learned of what had transpired he would not feel satisfied; but he was consoled by the thought that Matzko placed above all else birth and riches, which could add dignity to their own strength. Yagenka, it is true, was nearer to his own estate, but then, Yurand was a more important land owner than Zych, and it was not difficult to foresee that Matzko would finally begin to love Danusia as if she were his own child.

Suddenly Zbishko felt a longing for his uncle, who, though he was a stern man, loved and cherished him like the apple of his eye. In battle he guarded his nephew more than himself; for Zbishko's sake he seized the booty; for Zbishko he concerned himself about the property. There were only two of them in the world. Relatives they had none, except some remote ones, like the abbot. When, therefore, they happened to part, neither knew what to do without the other—especially the old man, who now desired nothing for himself.

"Yes, he will be glad! He will be glad!" repeated Zbishko. "I only wish that Yurand would receive me as warmly as the old man will." It would not do to challenge Yurand. If the latter persisted in his antagonism, Zbishko could tell him thus: "You had better consent, for your rights over Danusia are human, while mine are divine. She is no longer yours, but mine." He once heard a cleric, versed in holy writ, say that a woman must leave her father and mother, and follow her husband, and therefore he felt that this sacrament was irresistible. He did not think that a violent enmity would arise between him and Yurand, and blindly calculated on the prayers of Danusia, and as blindly on the interference of the prince, on whom Yurand was dependent, and the princess, whom he loved as the tutoress of his child.

At Prjhasnysh they were advised to stop over night, in view of the danger that threatened from the wolves, which were attacking even entire wagon trains. But finding at the inn some Mazovian knights, who were going to Tzechanow, and a

few armed merchants who were making their way to Prussia with wagon loads of goods, Zbishko preferred to join them.

Toard evening they all started, notwithstanding the fierce wind and overcast sky, which finally settled into a snow storm. They kept close to each other, and made so little headway that it seemed they would not get to Tzechanow on Christmas Eve. In some places it was necessary to clear the snow drifts, for otherwise the horses could not extricate themselves. Happily the road lay through the woods, and it was almost impossible to get lost. However, it was already dark when they espied fires burning on a height of Tzechanow, where a castle was in course of construction.

Meantime, the snowstorm grew more and more fierce. The cold and biting wind carried clouds of snow, bent the trees, roared, raised snow drifts into the air, whirled them into columns, turned them to dust, flung them into the faces of the travelers, and covered the wagons, horses and all. The sound of the bells attached to the shafts of the wagons was drowned by the whistle of the storm, in which were heard plaintive voices of wolves, or the distant neighing of horses, or, for aught that any one could distinguish, terror-stricken human voices imploring for help.

"If Yurand is on the road, may God help him!" said Zbishko.

The Czech, who was entirely absorbed in watching the fires, on hearing Zbishko's remark, turned around and asked:

"Is the master of Spichow also coming?"

"Yes."

"With the young lady?"

"The fires are out, are they not?" answered Zbishko.

The fires indeed had disappeared, and in a moment a few horsemen came galloping on the road, and were presently alongside the train.

"Why do you press so closely?" shouted the Czech. "Who are you?"

"The prince's people, sent to help the travelers."

"Glory to our Lord Jesus Christ!"

"Forevermore!"

"Lead us to the city!" shouted Zbishko.

"Are any of us behind?"

"None."

"Whence are you?"

"From Prjhasnysh."

"Have you met other travelers on the road?"

"We have not. But there are other roads."

"People have been sent in all directions. Follow us. You are on the wrong road. Turn to the right."

In answer to Zbishko's inquiries, one of the horsemen told him that there were many visitors at the prince's, and that men had been sent out to meet Yurand. But their conversation was interrupted by the howling of the wind.

"A veritable devil's wedding!" said the Czech.

But Zbishko ordered him to be silent, and not mention the evil spirit.

"Don't you know," he said, "that in such days the devil's power is weakened, and that the imps hide themselves in ice holes? One Christmas Eve, at Sandalir, the fishermen caught one of them in a net. He had a pike in his mouth, but when he heard the tolling of the bells, he immediately lost consciousness, and the fishermen beat him with sticks till vespers. Yes, this is a terrible storm, but it is sanctioned by our Lord Jesus Christ, who probably wishes to make the holiday the more joyful."

The snow lay in drifts on the streets of the town, in many places covering the windows, but the wind was not so biting. The streets were deserted, and the people were at supper. In front of some houses boys were caroling in spite of the storm, and in the market place some people could be seen dressed to resemble bears. Otherwise the streets were deserted.

Old Mrokota came out to meet the guests, whom he led into a room to change their clothing, after greeting them in the name of the prince. From the old man, Zbishko learned that ten horsemen had been sent to meet Yurand, who had not arrived yet, and that a spread was ordered for him at the common table, in expectation of his arrival that evening. He was glad to learn that everybody was well. Now, the lute is played by Yagenka, whom the princess loves, but not so much as Danusia.

"What Yagenka?" asked Zbishko, surprised.

"Yagenka of Welgoliás, the grandchild of the old knight. A fine girl. The Lotharingian is already in love with her."

"Is De Lorche also here?"

"Where else should he be? He came here from the forest castle, and is stopping here, for he is doing well. Our prince never lacks visitors."

"I will be glad to see him, for that knight is above reproach."

"He loves you also. But, come—the prince and princess are going to the table."

In the dining-room there were bright fires on the two hearth-

stones, attended by boys, and the room was being filled with guests and courtiers.

The prince entered first, escorted by the chief and some intimates. Zbishko bowed and kissed his hand.

The prince, embracing his head, took him aside and said:

"I know everything. I was vexed at first when I heard of your doing it without my permission; but, really, there was no time, for I was then in Warsaw, where I intended to pass the holidays. However, who does not know that it is vain to attempt to oppose a woman? The princess loves you like a mother, and I always like to please rather than quarrel with her, for that would grieve her and make her weep."

Zbishko bowed again.

"May God grant me an opportunity to serve you!"

The prince requested him to tell the princess how courteously he had received him, which he knew would gladden her heart. Her happiness, he declared, was his happiness. He also promised to say a good word in his favor to Yurand, and assured Zbishko that Yurand would surely consent, because he loved the princess.

"And if he does not give his consent, my authority would still be superior."

"Your authority is superior, and he will be compelled to consent; but he may withhold his blessing. That, you cannot force from him, and without parental blessing there cannot be God's blessing."

Zbishko became sad, for of that he had not thought before.

At that moment the princess entered, followed by Yagenka and other court girls. Zbishko sprang forward and bowed, and she received him even more courteously than the prince had done, and began to speak of the approaching visit of Yurand. He was stern, but not toward those whom he loved. And she began to instruct Zbishko how to behave toward his father-in-law, that he might not—God forbid!—be offended or angered. One with a more penetrating mind than Zbishko would have noticed an uneasiness in her voice and manner. Perhaps it was due to the fact that Yurand was not of a gentle temperament, or, again, because of her anxiety about his failure to arrive in time.

The storm continued, and everybody said that whoever was caught in the storm in the open field would never reach his destination. But the princess was occupied with other considerations. What if Danusia confessed to her father her marriage, and the offended parent decided not to come to Tzechanow? But the princess would not confide her thoughts to

Zbishko; besides, there was no time for it, for the food was being brought in and placed on the tables.

Zbishko again bowed to the ground, and asked:

"And if they do come, what will happen then, gracious lady? Mrokota told me that a separate room had been prepared for Yurand. There will also be hay enough for his armor-bearers' bedding. How will it be then?"

The princess began to laugh, and gently striking his face with her gloves, said:

"Be quiet! What would you have now? The idea!——"

And she went over to the prince, who was being seated by the servants. But, before that, one of them had handed to him a flat dish filled with finely chopped sweetened bread and wafers, which the prince was to distribute among the guests, the courtiers and the servants. A similar dish for the princess was held by a beautiful youth, the son of the Castellan of Sokhatchew. On the other side of the table stood Wyshonok, who was to bless the supper.

At that moment a man, all covered with snow, appeared at the door and said in a loud voice:

"Gracious master!"

"What would you?" said the prince, angered at the interruption of the ceremony.

"Some travelers are under the snow drifts on the Radzanow road. We must have more people to dig them out."

The people were alarmed, and the prince, turning to the Castellan of Sokhatchew, shouted:

"Send horsemen with shovels—quick!" then turned to the informant: "How many are there?"

"We could not count them. There is a dreadful snowfall. There are horses and wagons. The retinue is large."

"Do you know who they are?"

"They say it is the master of Spichow."

On hearing the sad news, Zbishko, without asking permission of the prince, ran to the stables, and ordered the horses saddled. The Czech followed him, and, with the servants hastily gathered by the Castellan, they started out, led by the man who had brought the news.

De Lorche, who was riding alongside of Zbishko, began to comfort the latter with the consideration that if Danusia was not left behind, she would surely be found sleeping between furs, for whatever happened, Yurand was sure to look to the safety of his daughter. Presently dark objects were seen protruding from the snow drifts, and on reaching the fatal spot, the men, horses and wagons were found in all possible

positions, the men and horses all rigid in death's embrace. Yurand was found sitting behind a tree, apparently frozen, like the rest.

The corpses were hastily dispatched to the nearest settlement, the distracted Zbishko and the Czech remaining to search for Danusia. No traces of her could be found, and the Czech thought that she could not have been with the party, for it could not be imagined that she would travel to Tzechanow with only the fur cloak she usually wore, for, on ransacking all the wagons, no chests belonging to Danusia, or woman's garments of any kind, were found. Zbishko's anxiety was relieved by this seemingly favorable circumstance. He could not restrain the feeling of happiness that came over him at the thought that with the death of Yurand all obstacles to the realization of his hopes were finally removed.

"Yurand did not wish it, but Christ did," said the young knight to himself. "The will of God is stronger. It is the will of God; it is the will of God!" he kept repeating to himself.

Yurand was the only one of the party who showed signs of life, the remainder having gone "to warm themselves at God's fireplace." The priest Wyshonok prescribed vapor baths for Yurand, and after a quantity of hot wine had been poured into his mouth, the master of Spichow became feverish and began to rave. Only on the second day did he recover consciousness. He arose on his couch, looked at the princess, who had been in constant attendance on him, and asked:

"Gracious lady!—For God's sake! I am not at Tzechanow?"

"Yes, you are at Tzechanow, and have slept over the holiday."

"I was snow-bound. Who saved me?"

"That knight, Zbishko of Bogdanetz. You remember him at Cracow——"

Yurand looked with his only eye at the youth, and said:

"I remember—and where is Danusia?"

"So she was not coming with you?" asked the alarmed princess.

"How could she be coming with me, when I was going to her?"

Zbishko and the princess exchanged looks, thinking that he was still raving. But after a few more questions there remained no doubt of the plot of the Crusaders.

"The letter is forged! The seal is false! Woe is me! My child was stolen! She will be ruined!" exclaimed the dis-

tracted father after his alleged letter had been read to him by the priest. "It was done by the Crusaders!"

"A scourge of Christ! We must tell the prince. He must send to the Magister!" shouted the princess. "Merciful Saviour! save her! help her!"

And she ran from the room crying. Yurand sprang from the couch, and with feverish haste began to dress himself. Zbishko sat as if petrified, only grinding his teeth from time to time in an ominous manner.

"How do you know that the Crusaders have stolen her?" asked the priest.

"I swear by the torments of Christ!"

"May be it is so. They came to the castle to complain against you—they sought to obtain revenge——"

"And they stole her!" suddenly cried Zbishko.

And he rushed from the room and ran to the stables, ordering the wagons and horses to be made ready, without knowing why. He only understood that it was necessary to hasten and save Danusia, to go even into Prussia and wrest her from the hands of the enemy, or perish.

He returned and told Yurand that the weapons and horses were ready. He was certain that Yurand would go with him. Anger, pain and grief boiled in his heart, but he did not lose hope, thinking that with the powerful knight of Spichow he could do anything, and would even dare to attack all the Crusaders.

In the rooms beside Yurand, Wyshonok and the princess, Zbishko found also the prince and old Nicholas of Dlugolias, whom the prince had invited for consultation, as a wise man who knew the Crusaders, and whose prisoner he had been for a number of years.

"Everything must be considered coolly, that we may not imperil the girl by our impetuosity," said Nicholas. "A complaint must be sent to the Magister, and if your grace will give me a letter, I will take it to him."

"I will give you a letter, and you will take it to him," said the prince. "We will not let the girl perish, and may God help us to save her! The Magister fears a war with the Polish King, and it is important for him that I and my brother Semko should be on his side. She was probably stolen without his knowledge, and he will order her release."

"And what if she was stolen by his order?" asked the priest.

"Although he is also a Crusader, he is more of a gentleman than the others," answered the prince. "And, as I have already told you, he would rather oblige than anger me. There



is no trifling with the power of Yagella! Ah! They fleeced us as long as they could, but they have come to their senses, for if we, the Mazovii, should help Yagella, they will not fare well——”

“Yes, it is true,” said the knight of Dlugolias; “the Crusaders do nothing without a purpose. I, too, think that they stole the girl in order to disarm Yurand, or either to get a ransom, or to exchange her for a prisoner.” And turning to Yurand, he asked: “What prisoners of war have you now?”

“De Bergow,” answered Yurand.

“Is he a distinguished person?”

“I think he is.”

De Lorche, hearing the name of De Bergow mentioned, began to inquire about him, and when told of the subject of the conversation, said:

“He is a relative of Count Heldern, the late friend of the Order, and comes of worthy ancestors.”

“Yes,” said Nicholas of Dlugolias, after repeating the words of De Lorche in Polish, “the De Bergow family have occupied important posts in the Order.”

“That was why Danefeldt and De Loewe always mentioned him,” said the prince. “They spoke of nothing else but the release of De Bergow. By God, they must have stolen the girl for the purpose of obtaining De Bergow’s release!”

“Then they will exchange her for him.”

“It would be better to first find out where she is,” said Nicholas; “for should the Magister ask me, ‘Whom am I to order to release the girl!’ what could I say?”

“They will not keep her near the frontier, for fear that I might rescue her,” said Yurand, “but have probably taken her to the Vistula or to distant Lithuania.”

“We will find her, and rescue her!” said Zbishko.

But suddenly the long suppressed wrath of the prince burst forth.

“From my castle the canine brood have stolen her; hence, they have offended me, and I will not forgive them that, so long as I live. I have had enough of their treachery—enough of their attacks! Better to have wolves for one’s neighbors! The Magister must punish these commanders, restore the girl, and send his envoys to me with excuses. Otherwise I shall summon the nobility to take up arms.”

He struck the table with his fist, and added:

“Oho! My brother of Platzk will join me, and Withold, and all the power of King Yagella. We have tolerated them long

enough! It would try the patience of a saint. I have had enough!"

Every one was silent, not wishing to resume the consultation until the prince's anger had subsided. Anna Danusia found solace in the fact that the prince made Danusia's cause his own. She knew that he was patient, but persistent, and that if he once undertook anything, he would never rest till he had carried it out. Finally the priest Wyshonok began:

"At one time obedience reigned in the Order, and no commander could undertake anything on his own responsibility without permission from the Chapter and Magister. Wherefore God placed in their hands so many lands that he raised them above all other people. But now there is no obedience, no truth, no conscience, no faith—nothing but greediness and malice, as if they were wolves and not men. Why should they obey the commands of the Chapter and the Magister, when they disobey the commands of God? Each one sits in his castle like an appanage prince, and they help each other in all evil deeds. We will make our charge, and they will deny it. If the Magister will order them to release the girl, they will refuse to do it, or will say: 'We have her not, because we have not stolen her.' He will command them to take an oath of denial, and they will take that oath. What shall we do then?"

"Let Yurand go to Spichow," said the knight from Dlugolias. "If she was stolen for the purpose of effecting an exchange, or to obtain ransom, they will have to notify Yurand, and not any one else; hence, it were better for him to be at home."

"She was stolen by those who came to the forest castle," said the priest.

"Then the Magister will order them to be tried by a court, or command them to meet Yurand in single combat."

"To combat!" shouted Zbishko. "They must first meet me, because I challenged them first!"

"Who was it that came to the forest castle?" asked Yurand.

"There was Danefeldt, and the old De Loewe, and the brothers Gottfried and Rotger," answered the priest. "They brought complaint, and asked that the prince command you to release De Bergow. But the prince learned from Fursi that the Germans had attacked you first, so he became enraged and sent them away."

The prince advised Yurand to go to Spichow, whither the Crusaders were sure to come; to let him know when they came. He assured him that they would exchange his daughter for De Bergow, and promised to have his revenge for stealing the girl from his house.

And again he became enraged, for the Crusaders had sorely tried his patience.

"They continued blowing into the fire," he said, "until they have finally scorched their snouts."

And Yurand began to repeat in a strange and terrible voice:

"Danefeldt! Loewe! Gottfried! Rotger!"

The princess, desiring to encourage him with a good word, turned to Yurand.

"Well, how are you now?"

Yurand remained silent a few moments, as if he had not heard the question, then suddenly said:

"I feel as if some one had thrust a knife into my old wound."

"Rely on the mercy of God. They will return Danusia, if you only give up De Bergow."

"I would not spare my own blood."

The princess thought it inopportune to disclose the marriage of Danusia, and decided to leave it to Zbishko, who, when searching with Yurand for the girl, would probably find an opportunity to make it known to him. She therefore spoke of something else.

"Do not blame us," she said. "People came with a letter purporting to be from you, which bore your seal, and which stated that you were ill, and were losing your sight; that you wished to see your child once more. How could we oppose the will of her father?"

"I do not blame any one, gracious lady."

"And know that God will restore her, as His eye is upon her. He will save her, as He saved her from the dreadful urus at the last hunt, when Christ inspired Zbishko to defend us. He almost lost his own life, and for a long time he was ill; but he saved Danusia and myself, for which the prince presented him with a girdle and spurs. The right hand of God is over her. Of course, her position is perilous and pitiful. I am sorry for her myself. I thought that she would arrive with you; that I would see the dear child; but now——"

Her voice trembled, and the tears rolled down her cheeks. The despair, which Yurand had till now suppressed, broke forth like a terrible whirlwind. He seized his long hair with his hands and began to beat his head against the wall, moaning and repeating hoarsely:

"Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!"

But Zbishko sprang toward him, and shaking him with all his might, shouted:

"It is time to go! On to Spichow!"

## CHAPTER II.

"Whose suite is this?" suddenly asked Yurand.

"Mine," answered Zbishko.

"Have all my men perished?"

"I saw them all dead."

"Then my old comrades are gone."

Zbishko made no answer, but rode on silently and rapidly, for they wished to get to Spichow as soon as possible, in the hope of finding there envoys from the Crusaders. Fortunately, the frosts smoothed the roads, so they were enabled to make haste. Toward evening Yurand began to inquire again about the people that came to the forest castle, and Zbishko repeated everything that had transpired, and suddenly he recalled the presence there of the woman who had brought the healing balsam from Danefeldt. He halted and questioned the Czech and Sauderus, but neither could remember what became of her.

It now occurred to Zbishko that she had been sent to warn the people in case they happened to find Yurand in the castle. They would then pretend to have come on a different mission, and probably had a different letter for such a contingency. The scheme had been so skillfully arranged that the young knight, who had only known the Crusaders in war, for the first time thought that it was not enough to possess a strong arm, but it was also necessary to be wiser than they. The thought grieved him, because his misfortune called forth in him, first of all, a thirst for struggle and blood. The rescue of Danusia appeared to him like a series of battles and single combats, and now he saw that his desire for revenge must be restrained, and new methods found to save her. He was sorry that Matzko was not with him, for Matzko was as crafty as he was strong. But he had himself decided to send Sauderus to Isirno, to find the woman and learn what had become of Danusia. Sauderus could not alter things by becoming a traitor; and if he remained true, his services would be very useful, for his occupation gave him access everywhere.

But Zbishko first desired to consult with Yurand, and deferred the matter till their arrival in Spichow, especially as it was growing dark; and it seemed to him that Yurand, who was sitting on his high saddle, had fallen asleep from exhaustion and grief. But Yurand's head was lowered only because he was bowed by misfortune. He was constantly thinking of his sorrow, and his heart was filled with fear.

"It were better I had died in the snow storm! Was it you who dug me up?" he said finally.

"Myself and others."

"And was it you who saved my child at the hunt?"

"How could I have acted differently?"

"And you will help me now?"

All his tenderness for Danusia, and all his hatred for the Crusaders now rose in Zbishko's heart. He raised himself in his saddle, and said, through his clenched teeth:

"Listen to what I will tell you: If I have to gnaw Prussian locks with my teeth, I will do it, but I will get her."

There was a moment of silence. The words of the youth had their effect on the vengeful nature of Yurand; he gnashed his teeth and began to repeat:

"Danefeldt! Loewe! Rotger! Gottfried!"

And in his soul he thought that if they demanded De Bergow, he would release him; if they demanded a ransom, he would pay, even if he had to sell or part with Spichow. But after that, woe to them who raised their hand against his only child!

He continued awake all night, and so much had he and Zbishko changed during the night that in the morning they could hardly recognize each other. The sufferings of Zbishko finally affected Yurand, and he said:

"Danusia covered your head and saved your life, I know. But do you also love her?"

Zbishko looked him straight in the face, and almost instantly answered:

"Danusia is my wife."

Yurand stopped his horse and looked wonderingly at Zbishko.

"What do you say?" he asked.

"I say that Danusia is my wife, and I am her husband."

The Spichow knight covered his face, as though he had been blinded by a flash of lightning, but made no answer. In a moment he spurred on his horse, and, gaining the front of the train, he continued on his way.

Zbishko, following Yurand, could not restrain himself, and mentally said: "It were better he broke out in anger, than rage within himself."

He caught up with Yurand, touched his stirrup with his own, and said:

"Listen, and I will tell you how it happened. What Danusia has done for me at Cracow you already know, but you do not know that at Bogdanetz I was sought in marriage by Yagenka,

the daughter of Zych of Zgojhelitzi. My uncle, Matz'ko, desired it, also Zych, and his relative, the abbot, also wished it—But why talk so long? She is a good and pretty girl, with a large marriage portion. But her marriage with me could not be. I was sorry for Yagenka, but was even more sorry for Danusia. Hence, I came to Mazovia, for I will tell you in good faith that I could no longer live without her. Think how you yourself loved once, and you will not be surprised."

Zbishko stopped, expecting to hear some word from the lips of Yurand, but the latter was silent, and the young knight continued:

"In the forest, Heaven gave the opportunity to save Danusia and the princess from an enraged bull. The princess then said: 'Yurand will not oppose now, for how can he help rewarding you for the act?' But even then I had no thought of taking Danusia without your consent. But, oh, how ill I was! The beast had nearly crushed the soul out of me. And then—you know—the people came to take her to Spichow, as they said, and I could not rise from my couch. I thought that I should never see her again. I thought that you would marry her to some one else. At Cracow you were against me. And I thought that I was dying. Great God! what a night that was! There was nothing but torture and grief! I thought that with her departure the sun would never rise again. You understand human suffering, human grief——" Tears choked Zbishko's voice, but he had a manly heart; he mastered himself and continued:

"They came after her in the evening, and wished to take her away immediately, but the princess commanded them to wait till morning. And then the Lord Jesus sent me the thought of asking the princess to give me Danusia in marriage. I thought that if I died there would remain that consolation to me. Remember that she had to depart, and that I lay on the brink of the grave. There was no time to obtain your permission. The prince had left the forest castle, and the princess hesitated, not knowing what to do, for there was no one to consult with. Finally, she and the priest Wyshonok took pity on me, and the latter married us. Divine power is divine law——"

"And divine chastisement," gloomily interrupted Yurand.

"Why chastisement?" asked Zbishko. "You must consider that these people came before our marriage, and whether we married or not, Danusia would have been carried away."

Yurand did not answer, but rode on, absorbed, gloomy, his face as motionless as if it were petrified. Zbishko at first felt

the relief usually following the disclosure of an oppressive secret, then took fright, and with growing alarm, kept repeating to himself that the old knight was concealing his wrath against him, and that now they were hostile toward each other.

Deep dejection followed the thought. Never since he left Bogdanetz had he felt so bad. It now seemed to him that there was no more hope, either of reconciling Yurand or of saving Danusia; that everything had failed him, and in the future there would be nothing but misfortune, nothing but sorrow. But his dejection did not last long, or, rather, thanks to his peculiar nature, it turned to an irritation, a desire to pick a quarrel. "He does not wish to consent; then let there come what may!" And he was ready to spring upon Yurand himself. He now had a strong desire to engage some one in combat, no matter for what cause, only to do something, to give vent to his grief, his indignation, his wrath, to find some relief.

Meantime they were approaching the inn in which Yurand customarily stopped when returning from the prince's castle to rest his men and horses. He involuntarily did the same thing now. Yurand and Zbishko were soon in a separate room. Suddenly Yurand stopped before the young knight, and fixing his eye upon him, asked:

"So you came here for her sake?"

Zbishko answered almost sharply:

"Think you I will deny it?"

And he looked straight into Yurand's eye, ready to retort in kind. But there was nothing fierce in the face of the old warrior, only limitless grief was reflected on it.

"And you saved my daughter?" he asked in a little while. "And dug me up?"

Zbishko looked at him with wonder, fearing the man had lost his reason, for Yurand repeated the same questions he had asked once before.

"Sit down," he said; "you seem to be weak yet."

But Yurand raised his hands, placed them on Zbishko's shoulders, and suddenly pressed him to his breast with all his might.

Zbishko, recovering from his momentary perplexity, also embraced Yurand, for they were bound by a common affliction and a common sorrow.

Finally Zbishko fell at the feet of the old knight, and, with tears in his eyes, began to kiss his hands.

"You will not be against me now?" he asked,

To which Yurand answered:

"I was only against you because in my soul I had promised her to God."

"You promised her to God, and God promised her to me. It is His will."

"It is His will!" repeated Yurand. "But now we need His compassion."

"Whom will God aid, if not a father seeking his daughter; if not a husband seeking his wife? It cannot be that He will help the villains!"

"And yet she was stolen," answered Yurand.

"Then give up De Bergow for her."

"I will give them everything they wish."

At the thought of the Crusaders the old hatred rose within him, and enveloped him like fire. He said through his clenched teeth:

"And I will also add what they do not desire."

"I have also taken a vow," said Zbishko; "but now we must go to Spichow."

There was a long road before them, and it was getting dark; and as neither Zbishko nor Yurand had entirely recovered, they drove in a sleigh. Zbishko told him of Matzko, whose craftiness and courage, and especially the latter, would be so useful now. At the end he turned to Yurand and asked:

"Are you cunning? I am not fit for anything."

"Nor I," answered Yurand. "I did not fight with cunning, but with this arm and the sorrow which is in me."

"I understand that," said the young knight. "I understand it, because I love Danusia, and because they have stolen her. If, God forbid——"

But he did not finish the sentence, for at the very thought he felt within his breast the heart of a wolf, and not of a man.

They drove silently over the snowy, moonlit road; then Yurand began to speak as if to himself:

"If they had had any cause for revenging themselves on me, I should not complain. But I swear by God that they have had no cause! I fought them on the battlefield when I went with an embassy from our prince to Withold, but here I was a neighbor, and acted as such—— Bartosh Naleutch seized the forty knights that were with him, and chained them in the Kozlina dungeon. The Crusaders were compelled to pay him a half wagon load of money as ransom. But when a German on the road to the Crusaders happened to come my way, I received him as a knight receives a knight, and provisioned him on the road. Even Crusaders often came to me. I was not



ferocious then, but they acted toward me as I would not act even toward my deadliest enemy."

Terrible recollections tormented him with constantly increasing force; his words stuck in his throat for a moment; then he continued, half moaning:

"She was my only little lamb, the heart in my breast, and they threw a rope around her neck as though she were a dog, and she turned white on their rope. Oh, Jesus! Jesus!"

And they became silent again. Zbishko raised to the moon his young face, on which wonder was depicted, then looked at Yurand and asked:

"Father! Would it not be better for them to seek people's love than hatred? Why, then, do they bring so much evil on all nations, and on all people?"

Yurand shrugged his shoulders and answered:

"I do not know."

For some time Zbishko mused on his question, then his thoughts again turned to Yurand.

"People say that you have worthily avenged yourself."

"Yes, because I have taken an oath—I vowed to God that if He helped me in avenging myself, I would offer him my only child. That was the reason I was against you. And now you have awakened His wrath by your act."

"We have not," said Zbishko. "I have told you that if we had not married, the dogs would still have stolen her. God accepted your intention, and gave Danusia to me. Without His will nothing can be done."

"Every sin is contrary to the will of God."

"Sin is one thing; holy mystery is a different thing. Mystery is a divine affair. And glory to God that it is so! Do not grumble, then, for no one will aid you against these murderers as much as I. You will see! We will avenge Danusia in good time; but if there is one of the men living who stole your wife, hand him over to me, and you will see what I will do with him."

Yurand shook his head.

"No," he answered gruffly, "not one of them is alive," and he became silent. Only the sniffing of horses and the clatter of wheels over the hardened road were heard.

"One night," resumed Yurand, "I heard a voice coming from the wall, which said, 'Enough of revenge!' but I paid no attention to it, because it was not the voice of my wife."

"Whose voice could it have been?" Zbishko asked in alarm.

"I do not know. In the Spichow walls certain voices and

groans were heard. Many people had died in chains in the underground dungeons."

"And what did the priest say?"

"He consecrated the town, and also told me to cease my revenge; but it could not be. I became unbearable to the Crusaders, and they began to take revenge on me. They called me out into the field and lay in wait for me. It was so the last time. Meingier and De Bergow were the first to challenge me."

"Have you ever taken ransoms?"

"Never. Of all those that I have taken, De Bergow will be the first to come out alive."

They turned from the wide road into a narrow path, which had many turns, and in some places became but a mere foot-path, abounding in almost impassable snow drifts. In the Spring and Summer, during the rainy seasons, the place must have been almost entirely inaccessible.

"Are we near Spichow?" asked Zbishko.

"Yes," answered Yurand. "We have a long distance to travel through the woods, but beyond there are the swamps which encircle the town. Beyond the swamps there are meadows and dry fields, but the town can be entered by the brush wood dams. Many a time the Germans attempted to seize me, but they invariably failed, and many of their bodies are rotting in the little forest lakes."

"Yes, it is hard to reach this place," said Zbishko. "If the Crusaders should send a letter to you, how will they reach you?"

"They have often sent me letters. They have people familiar with the road."

"If we should only find them at Spichow!" said Zbishko.

The desire of the young knight was gratified even sooner than he expected. They had scarcely emerged from the woods into the open country where Spichow stood encircled by swamps than they espied two horsemen and a low sleigh, in which three dark figures sat.

The night was very bright, and on the snow-covered ground the little group was outlined very distinctly. The hearts of Zbishko and Yurand began to beat faster. Who could be going to Spichow at night but envoys of the Crusaders?

Zbishko commanded the driver to whip up the horses.

They were soon seen, and two horsemen, who were apparently guarding the sleigh, turned, and, seizing their bows, shouted:

"Wer da?"

"Germans!" Yurand whispered to Zbishko.

Then he raised his voice and answered:

"It is my place to question—yours to answer! Who are you?"

"Travelers."

"What travelers?"

"Pilgrims."

"Whence are you?"

"From Stchitna."

"It is they!" again whispered Yurand.

And as they came alongside the sleigh, six other horsemen were seen. Those were the Spichow sentinels, who guarded the dam day and night. Behind the horses ran enormous fierce dogs, entirely resembling wolves.

The sentinels, seeing Yurand, greeted him with shouts, and in these shouts was also heard surprise at his unexpected return. But Yurand was entirely preoccupied with the Crusaders.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Spichow."

"What do you want there?"

"That we can only tell to the master of Spichow himself."

Yurand was about to announce himself as the man they wished to see, but understanding that the conversation could not take place in the presence of the people, desisted. And learning further that their message was a verbal one, he ordered that all haste be made in getting to the town.

Zbishko was so impatient in his desire to learn something about Danusia that he was angered when the horsemen twice crossed his path; his anger increased when the drawbridge was lowered over the trench, beyond which, on a rampart, rose the massive stockade. And though he had often wished to see that ominous fortification, at the very thought of which the Germans made the sign of the cross, now he only saw the envoys of the Crusaders. From them he would soon learn of the whereabouts of Danusia. The young knight did not know what a terrible disappointment awaited him.

Besides the horsemen, who came as a guard, and the driver, the Stchitna embassy consisted of two persons: one of them was the same woman who had brought the healing balsam to the forest castle, and the other was a young pilgrim. Zbishko did not recognize the woman, because, on account of his illness, he had not seen her at the castle, but the pilgrim at once appeared to him as a disguised armor-bearer. Yurand led them into a corner room and stood before them, colossal

and almost terrible in the light that fell upon him from the fireplace.

"Where is my child?" he asked.

The guests were frightened on seeing the terrible man before them. The pilgrim, notwithstanding his insolent face, trembled like an aspen leaf; the woman's feet gave way under her. Her eyes wandered from Yurand to Zbishko, then to the bald head of the priest Kaleb; then again to Yurand, as if asking why were these unnecessary people present.

"Master," she finally said, "we do not understand your question, but we were sent here on important business. He who sent us here strictly forbade us to speak in the presence of witnesses."

"I keep no secrets from these people," said Yurand.

"But we have one to keep, noble master," answered the woman, "and if you command them to remain here, we will ask of you nothing else but to permit us to depart to-morrow."

The face of Yurand, unaccustomed to resistance, became wrathful. There was a sinister movement of his flaxen mustache, but he considered that Danusia was at stake, and he restrained himself. And Zbishko, who only desired that the consultation should begin as soon as possible, and convinced that Yurand would relate to him everything, said:

"In that case, you may remain alone."

And he and the priest Kaleb left the room; but no sooner did he gain the principal room, adorned with curiasses and weapons, than Glawa approached him and said:

"Master, it is the same woman."

"What woman?"

"The one that brought the healing balsam from the Crusaders. I recognized her at once, and so did Sauderus. She probably came to make inquiries, and there is no doubt that she knows where the little lady is."

"We will also soon know it," said Zbishko. "And do you know that pilgrim?"

"No," said Sauderus. "But do not buy any indulgences of him, master, for he is a false pilgrim. If he were subjected to torture, he would disclose a great deal."

"Wait!" said Zbishko.

Meanwhile, in the corner room, as soon as the door closed behind Zbishko and the priest, the nun quickly approached Yurand and whispered:

"Your daughter was stolen by highwaymen."

"With crosses on their cloaks?"

"No. But God permitted the pious brethren to rescue her, and now she is with them."

"Where, then, is she, I ask?"

"Under the protection of the pious Brother Schomberg," answered the woman, crossing her arms on her breast, and bowing humbly.

Yurand, hearing the terrible name of the executioner of Withold's children, became as pale as death. He bowed his head, and with his palm wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead.

Seeing which, the pilgrim, who but a moment before could not conceal his terror, threw himself back on his seat, stretched his legs, and looked at Yurand with eyes full of pride and contempt. There was a long silence.

"Brother Marquart is helping Brother Schomberg to protect her," continued the woman. "There is a careful guard kept over her, and no one will harm her."

"What must I do to get her back?" asked Yurand.

"Submit to the Order!" arrogantly said the pilgrim.

Yurand rose, approached him, and, bending over him, commanded in a terrible, suppressed voice:

"Silence!"

The pilgrim was frightened again. He knew that he could threaten, he could say something that would restrain and even subdue Yurand, but considered that before he could utter a word, something terrible might happen to him. He became silent, his round, stony eyes fixed on Yurand, and sat motionless, only his chin began to shake.

Yurand turned to the nun.

"Have you a letter?" he asked.

"No, master; we have no letter. Our message is an oral one."

"Then speak."

The nun, apparently wishing to impress it on Yurand's memory, repeated:

"Brother Schomberg and Brother Marquart are guarding the little lady; therefore, master, restrain your anger—nothing will happen to her; and though you have been cruelly offending the Order in the course of many years, the brethren wish to pay good for evil, if you satisfy their just demands."

"What do they wish?"

"They wish you to release Master De Bergow."

Yurand gave a sigh of relief.

"I shall return De Bergow," he said.

"And the other prisoners which you have in Spichow."

"I have only two armor-bearers of Meninger and De Bergow, besides their servants."

"You must release them, master, and reward them for the imprisonment."

"God forbid that I should stop to bargain for my daughter!"

"The pious brethren expected it," said the woman; "but that was not all we were commanded to tell you. Your daughter, master, was stolen by people who were probably highwaymen, and, no doubt, expected to get a rich ransom. God willed it that the brethren should rescue her, and they wish nothing else but the release of their companion in arms and guest. But the brethren know, and you know, how they are hated in your country, and how unjustly their acts are judged, even the most pious. Therefore, the brethren are convinced that if your people learned that she is in their hands, they would say that the brethren had stolen her, and thus their virtue would be compensated with calumny and insult. Oh, yes! Your people are malicious detractors, and have often thus repaid the pious brethren; and the good name of the Order has suffered thereby. The brethren must guard its good name, and therefore make it a condition that you declare it to the sovereign of this country and to the ferocious knighthood—as is really the fact—that it was not the Crusaders, but some highwaymen, who stole your child, and that you must ransom her from these highwaymen."

"It is true," said Yurand, "that highwaymen have stolen her, and that I must ransom her from highwaymen."

"You must say nothing different to anybody. If but one person should know it, or should but one complaint be sent to the Magister or the Chapter, then grave difficulties would arise."

Yurand was troubled. At first he thought it quite natural that the commanders should require secrecy for fear of the responsibility and dishonor that would attach to disclosure, but now he suspected some other consideration. And as he was in the dark as to what that consideration might be, he was seized with fear—such fear as seizes the boldest men when danger threatens, not themselves, but their near and dear ones.

He determined, however, to fathom the designs of the Crusaders.

"The commanders demand secrecy," he said; "but how could I keep it secret when I must release De Bergow and others?"

"You will say that you took a ransom, in order to pay the highwaymen."

"People would not believe it, because I never took ransoms," gloomily said Yurand.

"Because it never was a question of your daughter's release," the nun explained in a hissing voice.

There was silence again. The pilgrim, who had meanwhile regained his courage, and thought that Yurand ought to restrain himself now, said.

"Such is the will of Brother Schomberg and Brother Marquart."

The nun continued:

"You will say that this pilgrim had brought you the ransom, and we will leave this place with the noble master De Bergow and the other prisoners."

"What?" asked Yurand, knitting his brow. "Do you think that I will release the prisoners before you have returned my daughter?"

"Well, then, you may come to Stchitna yourself, where the brethren will deliver her into your own hands."

"I should go to Stchitna?"

"If the highwaymen should steal her again on the road, your people will suspect the pious knights; therefore, they prefer to have you take her away."

"And who will guaranty that I will return, once I got into the jaws of the wolf?"

"The virtue of the brethren, their justice and piety."

Yurand rose and began to pace the floor. He already scented treachery, and was on his guard; but at the same time he saw that the Crusaders were in a position to make any terms, and that he was helpless.

Then, apparently struck by some thought, he stopped before the pilgrim, looked at him attentively for some minutes, and turning to the nun, he said:

"Very well. I will go to Stchitna. You and this man, who wears the garb of a pilgrim, will remain here till my return, and then you will depart with De Bergow and the other prisoners."

"Master," said the pilgrim, "you do not believe the knights; how can they believe that you will release De Bergow and ourselves?"

Yurand's face turned pale with indignation. In the dreadful moment that followed it seemed as if Yurand would seize the pilgrim and crush him under his knee, but he suppressed his wrath, sighed deeply and said slowly:

"Whoever you may be, do not try my patience, for it is well nigh exhausted."

The pilgrim turned to the nun:

"Say what you have been commanded."

"Master," said the nun, "we do not dare to doubt your oath taken on the sword, but it is not in keeping with your dignity to take an oath in the presence of common people; besides, we were not sent here for that."

"What were you sent here for?"

"The brethren told us that you must, without saying a word to anybody, appear at Stchitna, with De Bergow and the other prisoners."

Yurand's shoulders were thrown back, his fingers contracted like the claws of a bird of prey. Stopping before the woman, he bent over her as if desiring to whisper something in her ear, and said:

"Have they not told you that I would command that both yours and De Bergow's bones be broken at Spichow?"

"Your daughter is in the power of the brethren, and under the protection of Schomberg and Marquart," the woman said with emphasis.

"Of the murderers, poisoners, executioners!" fumed Yurand.

"Who would avenge us, and who said to us at parting: 'If he does not carry out our commands, it were better that the girl died, like the children of Withold.' Here is your choice!"

"And remember that you are in the power of the commanders," added the pilgrim. "They do not wish to be unjust with you, and the liege lord of Stchitna sends his promise, through us, that you will freely leave his castle; but they wish that for the wrongs which you have committed you should make reparation by bowing before the mantle of the Crusaders, and imploring the conquerors for mercy. They wish to forgive you, but first they wish to bend your proud neck. You called them murderers and traitors; now they wish you to throw yourself on their mercy. They will give you and your daughter liberty, but you must obtain it by entreaty. You have trampled them under foot; now you must swear that you will never raise your hand against the white mantle."

"That is the wish of the commanders, and also of Schomberg and Marquart," elucidated the woman.

A deathly silence followed. It seemed that somewhere between the beam of the ceiling a suppressed echo repeated in fright: "Marquart! Schomberg!" From without came the calls of Yurand's archers, stationed on the ramparts of the stockade.

The pilgrim and the nun for a long time looked now on each other, now on Yurand, who sat motionless, leaning with



his shoulders against the wall, with his face buried in the shade thrown by the bunch of skins which hung near the window. There was but one thought in his brain, that if he did not comply with the request of the Crusaders his child would be killed; and if he did comply, he would thereby save neither himself nor Danusia. And he saw no relief, no escape. A merciless power had overcome and was oppressing him.

Closing his eyes, he saw the iron hands of a Crusader at the throat of Danusia. He knew them well, and did not doubt for a moment that they would kill her, bury her on the rampart of the castle, deny any knowledge of her, and take a false oath. Who could then prove that they had stolen her? True, there were the envoys in the hands of Yurand. He could take them to the prince, and by torture force a confession from them. But there was Danusia in the hands of the Crusaders, who would not be loath to subject her to similar tortures. And it seemed to him that the girl was holding out her hands to him and imploring for help.

If he were only certain that she was in Stchitna, he could start the very same night for the frontier, attack the Germans, seize the castle, cut down the garrison, and release Danusia. But she might not be there, and most likely was not in Stchitna. The thought also flashed through his head that if he seized the pilgrim and the nun and took them to the Magister, the latter could force some confession from them, and order that his daughter be returned to him. But the thought was short lived. These people could say that they came to ransom De Bergow, and knew nothing about the girl. No! That would lead to nothing. But what was he to do? If he went to Stchitna, he would be placed in irons, and cast into a dungeon; and they would not release Danusia, because, in that case, the entire affair would be disclosed. Meanwhile, death is hanging over the head of his only child—over the last dear head!

Finally Yurand's thoughts became confused, and his grief overpowered him, and reached the stage of stupefaction. He sat motionless, because his body became as stiff as if it were hewn of stone. He could not rise if he wished to.

The envoys of the Crusaders became weary of the long wait. The nun rose from her seat and said:

"It will soon be day. Permit us to withdraw, master; we must have some rest."

"And to repair our strength after the long journey," added the pilgrim.

And both bowed to Yurand and withdrew.

Yurand still sat motionless, as if asleep or dead.

Finally the door opened and Zbishko appeared, followed by Kaleb.

"What did the envoys say? What do they wish?" asked the young knight, approaching Yurand.

Yurand trembled, but made no answer, only blinked his eyes like one awakening from sleep.

"Are you not ill, master?" asked the priest Kaleb. He knew Yurand better than others, and noticed something strange in his appearance.

"No," answered Yurand.

"And Danusia?" Zbishko continued his questioning. "Where is she, and what did the envoys say? What have they brought here?"

"A ransom," slowly answered Yurand.

"A ransom for De Bergow?"

"For De Bergow——"

"How for De Bergow? What is the matter?"

"Nothing."

In his voice there was something so unusual, so impotent, that both Zbishko and Kaleb were seized with alarm, the more so since Yurand spoke of a ransom, and not of an exchange of Danusia for De Bergow.

"I adjure you by God!" exclaimed Zbishko; "where is Danusia?"

"She is not with the Cru—sa—ders!" Yurand answered in a weak voice.

And suddenly he fell from the bench to the ground.

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### CHAPTER III.

On the following morning the envoys of the Crusaders again closeted themselves with Yurand, and before noon they departed with De Bergow, two armor-bearers, and a few other prisoners.

Then Yurand called in Kaleb and dictated a letter to the prince, in which he informed him that Danusia had not been stolen by the knights of the Order, but that he had discovered the place of her refuge, and that he hoped in the course of a few days to be able to free her. The same thing he repeated to Zbishko, who since the previous day had acted like a madman.

The old knight did not answer any of Zbishko's questions,

but in a low voice demanded that the latter make no attempt to rescue Danusia, because it would be unnecessary.

Toward evening he again locked himself in with the priest, dictated his last will, made his confession, and after partaking of the holy communion, called in Zbishko and the old, ever taciturn Tolima, who had followed him in all battles and combats, and in times of peace superintended the Spichow household.

"Here," he said, turning to the old warrior, and raising his voice as if speaking to one who was hard of hearing, "here is the husband of my daughter, who married her at the prince's castle, and to which I gave my consent. After my death he will be master here—consequently, the owner of the town, the lands, forests, meadows, the people, and everything else there is in Spichow."

Hearing this, Tolima was astonished, turned his square head now to Zbishko, now to Yurand, but said nothing, because he scarcely ever said anything, only leaned forward, and with his hands slightly touched his knees.

Yurand continued:

"This, my will, was written by Kaleb, and on the writing there is my wax seal. Hence, you must bear witness that you have heard it from myself, and must be obedient to this young knight as to myself. You will show him the money and booty in the treasury, and you will faithfully serve him in times of peace and war. Do you hear?"

Tolima raised his hand to his ear and nodded his head; then, at a sign made by Yurand, he withdrew, while the knight turned to Zbishko and said, with emphasis:

"With the contents of the treasury the most greedy man may be satisfied, and not only one, but a hundred men may be ransomed. Remember that."

"Why do you give me Spichow now?" asked Zbishko.

"I give you more than Spichow—my daughter."

"The hour of death is uncertain," said the priest.

"It is uncertain," repeated Yurand, sadly. "Some time ago I was snow-bound, and though God saved me, I have no longer my old strength."

"By God!" exclaimed Zbishko. "Your conduct is exceedingly strange!" You have changed since yesterday, and you prefer to speak of death rather than of Danusia."

"Danusia will return," answered Yurand. "She is under God's protection. But when she returns—listen!—take her to Bogdanetz, and leave Spichow to Tolima. They will not drag her with a rope there—it is safer there."

"You speak very strangely?" said Zbishko in wonder. "What does it mean?"

"I was already with one foot in the grave, and now some queer illness has seized me. And my daughter—is she not my only one? And you, although I know that you love her——"

And unsheathing a misericorde, he turned it to Zbishko, and said:

"Swear on this cross that you will never wrong her, and will love her faithfully."

Tears moistened the eyes of Zbishko. He threw himself on his knees, and placing his finger on the hilt, said:

"I swear by the holy torments of Christ that I will not wrong her, and will love her faithfully!"

"Amen!" said the priest Kaleb.

Yurand replaced the dagger and opened his arms to Zbishko.

"Then you are my child also!"

Then they parted, night approaching, and both of them needing rest. The next morning at sundown Zbishko rose and hastened to Yurand's apartment to inquire about his health, for he had been really alarmed on the previous evening. At the door of the old Knight he met Tolima.

"How is the master? Is he well?"

Tolima bowed, then placed his hand to his ear, and answered:

"What does your grace say?"

"I am asking, How is the health of the master?" Zbishko repeated louder.

"The master is gone."

"Whither?"

"I don't know. He wore his shield——"

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#### CHAPTER IV.

The dawn was already whitening the chalk and stone boulders strewn here and there over the field, when the hired guide, walking beside Yurand's horse, stopped and said:

"Permit me to rest, sir knight; I am tired. It is thawing and misty, but it is not so very far now."

"You will bring me to the road; then you will return," said Yurand.

"You will find the road to the right of the forest, and from the hillock you can see the castle."

The guide began to "warm" himself—that is to say, to clap

his sides with his hands, then seated himself on a rock, for the work made him even more tired.

"Do you know whether the commander is in the castle?" asked Yurand.

"Where else could he be, since he is sick?"

"What ails him?"

"People say that the Poles have thrashed him," answered the old peasant.

There was a note of satisfaction in his voice. He was a subject of the Crusaders, but his Mazovian heart delighted in the superiority of the Polish knights.

In a moment he added:

"Alas! Our masters are powerful, but they cannot overcome the Poles."

And he looked searchingly at Yurand, as if desiring to know if he were not going to be punished for the unguarded utterance. Then he asked:

"You, master, speak our tongue; you are not German?"

"No," answered Yurand; "but lead on."

The peasant rose, and again walked beside the horse. From time to time he thrust his hand into his bag, produced a handful of rye and poured it into his mouth; and when his first pangs of hunger had been satisfied, he began to explain why he ate grain, although Yurand, preoccupied with his own thoughts, scarcely heard him.

"Thanks to the Lord for that," said the peasant. "It is hard to live under the Germans. They have placed such a heavy tax on grinding grain that the poor man is compelled to chew the grain with the chaff. And if a man should get a millstone into his hut they would prosecute him and take all his property away. Not even the women and children do they spare. They fear neither God nor priests. One of the Welborg clerics, who reproved them for it, was chained and carried away. Oh, it is hard under the Germans! For Sundays we take a handful of grain and grind it between two stones; on other days we eat it like the birds. But thanks to the Lord for that! Soon we will run short of bread; then there will not be even that. Fishing is prohibited; so is hunting—not as in Mazovia—"

Thus the peasant complained, speaking partly to himself, partly to Yurand.

Meanwhile they passed the waste land, strewn with chalk boulders, and entered the gray forest, from which a damp breeze was blowing. It was day now, otherwise Yurand could hardly pass the winding path, so narrow that his huge war

horse barely forced himself through the stumps. But the little forest soon ended, and Yurand found himself on the summit of a hillock overlooking the main road.

"There is the road," said the peasant. "Now you will be able to proceed yourself."

"I will," answered Yurand. "Return home."

He drew a silver coin from the leather bag fastened to the front of his saddle and gave it to the guide. The peasant, more accustomed to beatings than gifts at the hands of the local knights of the Order, could hardly believe his own eyes; he grasped the coin, fell with his head on Yurand's stirrup, and caught it in his hands.

"Oh, Jesus! Mary!" he exclaimed. "May God reward your lordship. Stchitna is before you."

Again he bowed to the stirrup and disappeared.

Yurand remained alone on the hillock, and looked on the gray, humid curtain of mist which hid Stchitna from his view. Beyond that mist stood that sinister castle toward which violence and misfortune pushed him. It was near now—it was near! And later that would happen which God had ordained. Mingled with the trouble and alarm about Danusia, and his readiness to redeem her from the enemy with his own blood, at that thought, in the heart of Yurand there rose the hitherto unknown to him bitter feeling of abasement.

He, Yurand, at the mention of whose name the frontier commanders had always trembled, was now, at their command, coming to them with bowed head. He, who had conquered and trampled so many of them under foot, now himself felt conquered and trampled under foot. True, he had not been conquered in the field—had not been overcome by daring and knightly prowess—nevertheless, he felt himself conquered; and that was something so unusual that it seemed to him that the order of the world was turned upside down.

He was going to humble himself before the Crusaders—he who, were it not that Danusia was at stake, would prefer single-handed to try conclusions with all the forces of the Order. Were there not cases when some knight, who had to choose between disgrace and death, single-handed fell upon the foe's army? And Yurand felt that he might have to meet disgrace, and at the thought of it his heart howled with pain, as does a wolf when feeling the sharp point of a javelin in its body.

But not only the body, but the soul, of Yurand was of iron. He could break others, and could also break himself.

"I will not move from this place," he said, "until I have

fettered my wrath, which would sooner ruin than save my child."

And he went into the combat, as it were, with his proud soul, with all his ferocity and thirst for battle. As he stood then on the hillock, armed from head to foot, motionless, on his huge horse, he looked like some giant, cast of iron, and not like the knight that he was, undergoing the hardest struggle of his life. But he kept struggling until he felt that he had conquered himself, and that his will would not fail him.

Meantime the mist was thinning, and a dark object was seen straggling in the distance. Yurand took it to be the walls of the castle; nevertheless he remained motionless, only he began to pray fervently, like a man who had nothing but God's mercy left him in the world. And when he finally spurred his horse onward, he felt a certain comfort creeping into his heart. Now he could bear anything that might befall him. He recalled Saint Gregory, a scion of the most famous Cappadocian race, who had suffered all sorts of ignoble tortures, and not only lost none of his honor, but came at last to sit on the right hand side of God, and was considered the patron saint of all the knighthood. Yurand had frequently heard stories of his misfortunes from pilgrims coming from foreign countries, and now fortified himself with them.

Little by little even hope awakened within him. True, the Crusaders were known for their vengefulness, and he did not doubt that they would wreak vengeance on him for all the defeats they had sustained, for the degradation that had fallen upon them every time they met him in battle, and the fear in which they had lived so many years.

But it was these very considerations that gave him courage. Danusia had been stolen for the purpose of entrapping him, and after his seizure, what would they do with her? Yes, he would surely be chained, and, not to keep him near Mazovia, they would send him to some distant castle, where he would, perhaps, moan the rest of his days in an underground dungeon. But they would release Danusia. Although it should become known that he had been seized by treachery and was subjected to torture, neither the Great Magister nor the Chapter would consider themselves reprehensible, because Yurand had for years been really the terror of the Crusaders, and had spilt more of their blood than any other knight. But, then, the Great Magister would surely punish them for stealing an innocent child, the ward of the prince, whose good will he sought to obtain in view of the threatening war with the King of Poland.

And his hope grew stronger and stronger. At times it seemed to him indubitable that Danusia would return to Spichow under the powerful protection of Zbishko. "He's a sensible fellow," thought Yurand, "and will not let anyone wrong her." And with an affectionate feeling he recalled everything Zbishko had told him. "He has beaten the Germans, challenged them to single combat; thrashed the Frisians, and also Lichtenstein; saved Danusia from the aurochs, and challenged those four commanders, and, of course, will never forgive them."

Yurand raised his eyes to heaven and said:

"Lord, I gave her to Thee, and Thou didst give her to Zbishko!"

And he felt even more relieved; for if God had given Danusia to the young knight, He would surely not permit the Germans to mock Him, but would snatch her from their hands, even against the whole power of the Crusaders. Then his thoughts again reverted to Zbishko.

"Yes, that fellow is not only sensible, but is as pure as gold. He will guard her; he will love her. The Lord Jesus will send her happiness. And it seems to me that when in his company she will miss neither the prince's palace nor her father's love."

His eyelashes suddenly became moist, and a dreadful oppression weighed on his heart. For he still wished to see his daughter, and die in Spichow, in the presence of her and her husband, and not in the dark underground dungeons of the Crusaders. But the will of God would prevail!

Stchitna could already be seen. Its walls became more and more distinctly outlined in the mist, the hour of sacrifice was approaching, and Yurand, taking courage, turned his reflections upon himself, with the following speech:

"It must be the will of God! And the evening of life is near. A few years more, a few years less—what difference would it make? Ah, I would like to look again on the two children; but, verily, I have already lived long enough. Of experience I have had my fill; I had my revenge on such as I could lay hands on. What now? I would rather depart from this world than return to it; and if it will be necessary to suffer, I will suffer. Danusia and Zbishko, how so richly they may live, will not forget me. Of course, they will often think of me, and ask each other: 'Where is he now? Is he alive, or is he consulting with God?' They will make inquiries, and may perchance find me. The Crusaders are thirsting for revenge, but they also thirst for ransom. Zbishko will not be niggardly,



and will at least ransom my bones. They will surely pay for prayers after my death. They are both kind-hearted and loving, for which bless them, Oh Lord, and Thou, Most Holy Mother!"

The road was widening and beginning to fill with people. Wagonloads of wood and hay were coming to the city. Drovers were arriving with their flocks. Frozen fish was being brought from the lakes. At one place four archers were leading a peasant to court, apparently for some crime, for his hands were bound behind his back and his feet were in shackles, which rendered his progress through the sward almost painful. He was extremely tired; circling clouds of vapor came from his nostrils, while the archers goaded him on, singing a song.

Seeing Yurand, they began to eye him with curiosity, wondering at the size of the horseman and the horse; but on noticing his golden spurs and knight's girdle, they lowered their bows in sign of salutation and respect.

The city itself was more crowded and noisy, but the people invariably made way for the armed knight, who passed the main street and turned to the castle, which seemed to be sleeping, enveloped in mist.

The ravens were the only living creatures awake; in flocks they circled above the hillock near the castle, flapping their wings and croaking. Yurand, coming nearer, understood its significance. On the road leading to the castle gate stood a large gallows, from which four Mazovian peasants, subjects of the Order, were swinging. It was calm, and the corpses, apparently intently looking at their feet, were motionless, except when the black birds lighted on their shoulders and began to pick at the ropes and the inclined heads. Some of them must have been hanging a long time, for their skulls were devoid of flesh, and their legs were abnormally long.

At the approach of Yurand the flocks rose with a terrible croaking, but immediately returned and began to light on the crossbeam of the gallows. Yurand, passing the hillock, made the sign of the cross, neared the trench, and, stopping at the drawbridge, blew his horn. Then he blew a second time, and a third, and waited.

There was not a living soul on the walls, and not a voice came from behind the gate. But in a little while the iron window of the gate noisily opened, and the bearded face of a German servant appeared.

"Wer da?" asked a rude voice.

"Yurand of Spichow," answered the knight.

After these words the window was slammed, and silence fol-

lowed. Not the slightest movement was heard behind the gate; only the croaking of the birds came from the gallows.

Yurand stood a long time before he again blew his horn. But still there was no answer. He then understood that it was the Order's pride that kept him at the gate—a pride, which, in treating the conquered, had no bounds—their desire to abase him as if he were the lowest pauper. He also understood that he would have to wait till evening, or even later. At first his blood began to boil; he was seized with a desire to dismount, grasp one of the stones lying near the trench, and hurl it into the grated window. Under different circumstances he or any other Mazovian or Polish knight would have done that very thing and taken the consequences. But, remembering the purpose of his coming, Yurand restrained himself.

"Have I not sacrificed myself for my daughter?" And he waited.

Presently, on the battlements of the castle wall, dark objects appeared. Fur caps were seen, and even iron helmets, from under which curious eyes looked at the knight. The crowd was growing every moment.

The terrible Yurand, standing alone before the Stchitna gate, was no common sight to the garrison. Formerly, to look upon him was to look upon death, but now one could safely gaze on him. Yurand thought that there were probably some of the superior officers looking at him from the grated windows of the tower. He raised his eyes, but the windows were cut in the deep wall, and the distance rendered a distinct view impossible.

The menials, who so far were looking on in silence, now began to laugh and jeer, hoarse voices began to shout as they do at wolves, louder and louder, more and more insolent, and when the soldiers saw that no one in the castle interfered with them, they began to throw snow at the waiting knight.

Yurand involuntarily moved forward, and in a moment the snow throwing ceased, the voices became silent, and some heads even disappeared behind the wall. The name of Yurand must really have been terrible.

Some time passed, and the most cowardly considered that there was the wall and trench between them and the Mazovi, and resumed the throwing, not only of snow, but pieces of ice and small stone, which rebounded with a dull sound from his cuirass.

"I have sacrificed myself for my daughter," repeated Yurand. And he waited.

It was midday, the walls were deserted, the servants were

called to dinner. Those who remained on watch ate their dinner on the wall, and after dinner began to throw bones at the hungry knight. While doing so they began to discuss who should go down and strike the knight with his hand or spear shaft. Others, returning from their dinner, began to shout to Yurand:

"If you are tired waiting, you may hang yourself on the spare hook and rope on the gallows."

The afternoon hours passed while these jeers and curses were hurled at him. The short Winter day was drawing to a close, and the drawbridge was still hanging in the air, and the gate remained closed.

Toward evening a wind arose, clearing the atmosphere and permitting the evening twilight to take sway. The snow became first blue tinted, then violet. There was no frost, but the night promised to be clear. The people on the wall again disappeared; the ravens and crows left the gallows for the woods; the sky became dark, and perfect silence followed.

"The gate will not be opened before nightfall," thought Yurand.

For a moment he thought that he would go to town, but immediately dismissed the thought.

"It is their desire that I should stand here," flashed across his mind. "If I should go, they would surround and seize me, and will then say that they are under no obligation toward me, because they took me by force."

The remarkable endurance of the Polish knights, which astounded the contemporaneous chroniclers, made it possible for them to perform acts which the more effeminate people of the west would not dare to attempt. Yurand possessed that endurance in greater measure than others.

Although he had for a long time been tortured by hunger; although the cold evening breeze penetrated his armor-covered clothing, he decided to wait, even if he had to die at the gate.

But suddenly, before darkness had really set in, he heard behind him steps creaking on the snow.

Turning, he saw six men, armed with bows and halberds, approaching him, and between these what seemed to be a superior officer walked, carrying a sword.

"Perhaps they will open the gate for them; then I will enter with them," thought Yurand. "These are not coming to take me by force, nor to kill me, because they are too few; but should they attack me it would prove that they do not intend to keep faith with me in anything. Then woe to them!"

He raised the steel ax hanging from his saddle—which ax

was so heavy that an ordinary man could hardly raise it with both hands—and spurred his horse toward the approaching group.

But they had no intention of attacking him. On the contrary, the servants stuck their bows and halberds in the snow; and as it was not quite dark, Yurand noticed that the weapons slightly trembled in their hands.

The officer hastily extended his left hand, with the palm turned upward, and asked:

“Knight, are you Yurand of Spichow?”

“Yes.”

“Do you wish to listen to what I have been commanded to tell you?”

“I am listening.”

“The mighty and most pious Commander von Danefeldt directed me to tell you, sir, that unless you dismount you cannot enter the castle.”

For a moment Yurand remained motionless, then hastily dismounted, and at the same time one of the archers sprang toward the horse.

“And you must also give us your weapons.”

The lord of Spichow hesitated. What if they attacked him when he was unarmed, and hunted him like a beast? What if they seized him and threw him into the dungeon? But he immediately considered that, had they such intentions, a larger force would have been sent. Should they attack him, before they could ever break his armor, he could seize the weapons from the nearest man, and cut them all down before aid arrived. They knew him too well.

“But even if they wish to shed my blood,” he thought, “for what other purpose have I come here?”

He first threw down his ax, then his sword, and finally his misericorde. The archers gathered the weapons, and the man who was speaking to him drew back a few steps, stopped, and said in a loud, insolent voice:

“For all the wrongs you have caused the Order, by the order of the commander you must wear this sack, which I leave here, place around your neck a rope, to which is attached an empty scabbard, and in humbleness wait at the gate until it pleases the commander to admit you.”

And in a moment Yurand remained alone in the darkness and quiet of the night. On the snow before him lay the sack of contrition and a rope. For a long time Yurand stood, feeling in his soul something bending, breaking, dying and perishing—that in a moment he would no longer be a knight, would

no longer be Yurand of Spichow, but a pauper, a slave without name, without glory, without honor.

Long hours passed before he approached the sack of contrition, and said:

"What else can I do? Thou, Christ, knowest! My innocent child will be strangled if I do not do what I am commanded. Thou also knowest that I would not do it to save my own life. Disgrace is bitter!—very bitter! But even Thou was disgraced before death. Well, in the name of the Father and the Son——"

He stooped, put on the sack, which had openings for his head and arms, tied around his neck the rope, to which was attached an empty scabbard, and dragged himself to the gate.

He did not find it open, but he cared little now whether it was opened sooner or later.

The castle was wrapped in the darkness of night, only the guard on the corners of the towers shouted to each other at intervals. In the tower above the gate a solitary window was lit up from within, all the others were dark.

The hours passed. The sickle-shaped moon rose in the sky and lighted the huge walls of the castle. It was so quiet that Yurand could hear the beating of his own heart. But he stood there insensible to everything, petrified, as if his soul had been plucked out of him. Only the one thought remained in him—that he had ceased to be a knight, Yurand of Spichow; but what he was now, he himself could not tell. At times it seemed to him that from those hanged corpses death was silently stealing toward him in the dark.

Suddenly he shuddered and came to himself.

"Oh, merciful Christ! What is that?"

The scarcely audible sounds of a lute reached him from the high window of the tower. Yurand, when coming to Stchitna, was certain that Danusia was not in the castle, yet that sound of the lute alarmed his heart. It seemed to him that he recognized those sounds, which could have been evoked from the lute by no other than her hand—that of his child, his darling!

He fell on his knees, folded his hands in prayer, and, trembling as in fever, listened.

At the same time a childish and seemingly sad voice began to sing:

"If God would give me wings,  
As the birds in freedom born,  
I would fly with heart and soul  
To Yass, in foreign lands forlorn."

Yurand wished to call out the loved name, but the word stuck in his throat, as if it were clamped with an iron hoop.

Suddenly a wave of pain, tears, sadness and misfortune flooded his heart; he threw himself with his face on the snow, and his soul poured forth an exultant, grateful prayer:

"Oh, Jesus! So, I can yet hear the voice of my child! Oh, Jesus!"

His powerful body shook with the sobbing, and the sad voice from above sang on amid the undisturbed silence:

"I would light on a fence  
And sing my humble lay,  
Oh, look, Yassko! look!  
See your orphan o'er the way."

Early in the morning a stout, bearded soldier began to kick the prostrate knight.

"Up, you dog! The gate is open, and the commander has ordered you to appear before him."

Yurand awoke as if from sleep. He did not seize the soldier by the throat; did not strangle him in his iron hands. His face was peaceful, and even suppliant. He rose, and without saying a word, followed the soldier through the gate.

But he had scarcely passed it, when behind him was heard the clanking of chains; the drawbridge was being raised, and the heavy iron grating in the gate was lowered.

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## CHAPTER V.

Yurand, finding himself in the courtyard of the castle, at first could not think where to go, because the soldier who had led him in abandoned him and went to the stables. True, there were soldiers standing, singly and in groups, but their faces were so insolent, their looks so jeering, that the knight readily understood that they would not show him the way, and if they answered his questions it would only be in a rude and contemptuous manner.

The soldiers laughed and pointed their fingers in the direction of Yurand. Some even threw snow at him, as they had done the day before. But Yurand noticed a door, distinguished from the others by its size, above which there was a stone image of Christ, and proceeded in that direction, thinking even if the commander and the elders of the Order were in another part of the castle, some one would direct him to the proper entrance.

And so it happened. At the moment when Yurand approached the doors, they suddenly opened, and a young man, with head shaven like a monk, but in secular attire, appeared and asked:

"Sir, are you Yurand of Spichow?"

"Yes."

"The noble commander ordered me to escort you. Follow me."

The young man escorted Yurand through the arched vestibule to the stairway. But before stepping on the stairs, he halted, inspected Yurand from head to foot, and asked:

"Have you any weapons about you? I was ordered to search you."

Yurand raised both hands, to permit his escort to examine him more closely, and answered:

"I surrendered all my weapons yesterday."

Then his escort lowered his voice, and said, almost in a whisper:

"In that case restrain your anger, for you are entirely dependent on the will of others."

"But also on the will of God!" answered Yurand.

Saying these words, he looked attentively at his escort, and, noticing on his face commiseration and sympathy, added:

"Young man, your eyes disclose a kind soul. Will you frankly answer my question?"

"Sir, hasten," said the escort.

"Will my child be exchanged for me?"

The young man raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Is your child here?"

"Yes—my daughter."

"That girl who is in the tower above the gate?"

"Yes. They promised to release her if I surrendered myself."

The escort made a motion with his hand, as if to say that he knew nothing, but doubt and alarm were reflected on his face.

"Is it true that Schomberg and Marquart are guarding her?" continued Yurand.

"These brethren are not in the castle. However, they won't remove her before Danefeldt has recovered."

When he heard this Yurand shuddered; but there was no time for further questioning, because they had reached the hall where Yurand was to appear before the liege lord of Stchitna. The young man opened the door and stepped back to the stairway.

The Knight of Spichow entered and found himself in a large room, which was very dark, as the windows, framed in lead, permitted but little light to penetrate; besides, it was a gloomy, wintry day. There was a fire at the other end of the room, but the poorly dried wood threw but little light.

At the expiration of some minutes, when the eyes of Yurand became habituated to the semi-darkness, he noticed in the depth of the room some knights sitting at a table, and behind them a crowd of armed armor-bearers and servants, among whom the castle jester held a trained young bear by a chain.

Yurand had met Danefeldt before; he had seen him twice at the court of the Mazovian prince, whither he had gone as envoy. But several years had since passed. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the semi-darkness, he recognized the German knight by his face and his stoutness, and, finally, by the fact that he occupied the centre of the table, in an arm chair, his arm wrapped in splints. To the right of him sat old Siegfried de Loewe, an implacable enemy of the Polish race in general, and Yurand in particular; to the left, the lesser brethren, Gottfried and Rotger.

Danefeldt had purposely invited them to witness his triumph over the terrible foe, and to enjoy the fruits of the treachery in which they were participants. They were now snugly seated, dressed in soft garments of dark cloth, with light swords at their sides—joyful, self-confident, examining Yurand with pride, and the boundless contempt they always felt toward the weak and conquered.

The silence continued for a long time, for the Crusaders were thirsting to enjoy the spectacle of the man whom theretofore they simply feared, and who now stood before them with head lowered on his breast, dressed in the sack of contrition, and an empty scabbard hanging from his neck.

The Crusaders apparently wished to have as large a number of people as possible present to witness Yurand's humiliation, for the doors leading into the other rooms were open, and the hall was almost filled with armed men. But Yurand's hope was only strengthened, and he thought to himself:

"If Danefeldt did not intend to keep his promise, he would not have called so many witnesses."

Meantime, Danefeldt, with a wave of the hand, stopped the conversation, and made a sign to an armor-bearer, who approached Yurand, caught hold of the rope bound around his neck, and pulled him a few steps nearer to the table.

Danefeldt triumphantly glanced around him, and said:



"Look! Behold how the power of the Order conquers evil and pride!"

"May God grant it to be always so!" answered the Crusaders.

After a moment of silence Danefeldt turned to the prisoner:

"You have bitten the Order like a mad dog, wherefore God has so arranged it that you stand here like a dog, awaiting favors and condescension."

"Do not compare me to a dog, commander," answered Yurand, "for thereby you are depriving of honor those that fell by my hand."

After these words a whisper ran through the crowd of armed Germans, but whether they were angered by the boldness of the answer, or they were struck by its justice, was hard to tell.

But the commander did not like the turn the affair had taken, and therefore said:

"Look! Even here he spits in our faces with pride and arrogance!"

Yurand raised his hands, like a man who is calling Heaven to witness, and answered, shaking his head:

"God is my witness that I left my pride beyond the castle gate. God will judge whether, disgracing my dignity as a knight, you do not also disgrace yourself. The dignity of a knight is the same the world over, and whoever wears a knight's girdle must respect it."

Danefeldt knit his brow, but at the same moment the castle jester tugged at the chain to which was fastened the young bear, and shouted:

"A sermon! A sermon! A preacher come from Mazovia! Attention! A sermon!"

He then turned to Danefeldt.

"Sir!" he said, "Count Rosenheim, when the bell woke him for mass earlier than was necessary, commanded the sexton to eat the rope from end to end. This preacher has also a rope around his neck; command him to eat it before he has finished the sermon."

Saying which, he looked at the commander with anxiety, not knowing whether Danefeldt would burst out laughing or command him to be whipped for his untimely interference. But the brethren of the Order, meek, and even humble, when they felt no power behind them, knew no measure in humiliating the conquered. Not only did Danefeldt nod his head to the jester in approval, but gave vent to such a torrent of abuse that some of the younger armor-bearers were perplexed.

"You have no cause to complain that you have been disgraced," he said to Yurand; "even if I had made a dog-keeper of you; for a German dog-keeper is better than any of your knights."

"Fetch the currycomb and comb the bear," commanded one of the brethren. "In return he will comb the flax on your head with his paw."

Here and there in the crowd laughter was heard, and from behind the brethren came a voice:

"In the Summer you will mow the bulrushes in the bogs!"

"And fish for lobsters in the wind!" exclaimed another.

And a third one added:

"And now you can drive the ravens from the gallows. There will be no lack of work for you."

Thus they jeered at the once terrible Yurand. Gradually the merriment took possession of all that gathered in the hall. Some of them, leaving the table, approached the prisoner, examined him, and said:

"So, this is the wild boar of Spichow, from whom our commander has drawn the tusks! His jaws are covered with foam—he would like to butt some one, but cannot."

Danefeldt and the other brethren, who wished to give the examination a solemn semblance of trial, seeing that the affair had taken a different turn, also rose from the benches and mingled with those that came near Yurand.

Presently filled jugs were clanking, and the dark hall was filled with the odor of the beer foam that oozed from under their covers.

"That is better! Let him not think that his disgrace is an important matter!" said the enlivened commander. And the Crusaders again approached Yurand, and thrusting their jugs under his chin, mocked him.

"Wouldn't you like to drink, Mazovian snout!" While others poured beer on their palms, and threw it in his eyes.

He stood among them, stunned, covered with insults, but finally moved toward old Sigfried, and feeling that he could no longer bear it, shouted so as to drown the noise that reigned in the hall:

"For the sake of the passion of Our Lord, return to me my daughter, as you promised!"

And he was about to seize the hand of the old commander, but the latter stepped back and said:

"Do not approach me, slave! What do you wish?"

"I have released De Bergow, and came here because you promised to return my daughter, who is here."

"Who promised you?" asked Danefeldt.

"In the name of honor and faith—you, commander!"

"You have no witnesses, but witnesses are not necessary when the affair is one of honor and faith."

"Of your honor, of the honor of the Order!" exclaimed Yurand.

"Then, you shall have your daughter!" answered Danefeldt. Then he turned to the assemblage and said:

"All that he has met with here is innocent play in comparison with his transgressions and crimes. But as we have promised to return him his daughter if he appear and confess his faults before us, then know ye that the word of a Crusader must be as irrevocable as the word of God; that the girl whom we have rescued from highwaymen shall have her liberty; and after he has done penance for his sins against the Order, we will permit him also to return home."

Some of the knights were surprised at these words, for, considering Danefeldt's dissatisfaction with Yurand, they did not expect such magnanimity.

Then old Sigfried, and with him Rotger and Brother Gottfried, knit their brows in surprise, but Danefeldt pretended not to see it, and continued:

"We will send your daughter under guard, and you will remain here until the guard has returned and you have paid a ransom."

Yurand, who had almost lost all hope of obtaining Danusia's release by his sacrifice, was so amazed that he looked at Danefeldt almost with gratitude, and said:

"May God reward you, commander!"

"You will know now what a knight of God is," said Danefeldt.

"From Him flows all grace!" exclaimed Yurand, reverently. "As I have not seen my daughter for a long time, permit me to see and bless her."

"Yes, but in the presence of all of us, that everybody may bear witness to our faithfulness and mercy."

And he ordered one of his men to bring Danusia; then approached Von Loewe, Rotger and Gottfried, between whom a heated conversation followed.

"I am not against it, although your intentions were different," said old Sigfried.

The impetuous Rotger, known for his ferocity, interrupted him:

"What! You will release not only the girl, but that infernal dog, that he may bite again?"

"And he will bite worse than before!" exclaimed Gottfried.

"Oh, well!—he will pay a ransom!" carelessly answered Danefeldt.

"Even if he gave all his fortune, in one year he will rob us of double that fortune."

"I do not oppose the release of the girl," repeated Sigfried, "but the sheep of our Order will suffer at the hands of that wolf."

"And our promise?" said Danefeldt, smiling.

"You did not speak that way before——"

Danefeldt shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you not amused yourself enough?" asked Danefeldt.

"Do you wish some more merriment?"

Other Crusaders again surrounded Yurand, and, conscious of the glory which, thanks to the noble act of Danefeldt, now surrounded all the people connected with the Order, began to brag in the face of the Spichow knight.

"Well, bone-breaker," said the captain of the castle archers, "would your fellow heathens act thus with a Christian knight?"

"You have drunk our blood!"

"And we return you bread for stone——"

But Yurand ceased to pay attention to the pride and contempt that rang in their words. His heart was overfilled; his eyes were moist. He was thinking that in a moment he would see Danusia, and really see her through the kindness of the Crusaders; he looked at them almost with contrition, and finally said:

"True, true! I was hard on you, but I never took—by treachery."

At that moment some one at the other end of the hall shouted: "She is coming!" and everybody became silent. The soldiers drew back, forming a passageway. None of them had seen Yurand's daughter before, and the majority, thanks to the secrecy which Danefeldt had observed in all his acts, did not even know that she was in the castle. But now the rumor of her beauty had spread throughout the crowd. All eyes were fixed with curiosity on the door from which she was to appear.

An armor-bearer emerged from the door, followed by the well known lay sister of the Order—the one that had brought the balsam to the forest castle, and behind her came a girl dressed in white, with flowing hair and a red ribbon tied around her forehead.

And suddenly a burst of laughter reverberated throughout the hall like rolling thunder.

Yurand, who at first sprang forward to greet his daughter, fell back and became as pale as death. He gazed in amazement at the pointed head, the blue lips, the insipid eyes, of the young girl who was presented to him as Danusia.

"This is not my daughter," he said in a trembling voice.

"Not your daughter?" exclaimed Danefeldt. "By Saint Libarius! So it was not your daughter whom we rescued from the highwaymen; or was she substituted by some magician?"

Old Sigfried, Rotger and Gottfried exchanged quick looks full of the greatest wonder at the adroitness of Danefeldt, but before either of them could make any remark, Yurand began to cry in a terrible voice:

"She is here! In Stchitna! I have heard her sing; I have heard the voice of Danusia!"

In answer to this, Danefeldt turned to those present and said in a calm voice:

"I take you all to witness—especially you, Sigfried of Tusborg, and you pious brethren, Rotger and Gottfried, that, in view of the promise made, I return the girl, whom the highwaymen alleged to be the daughter of Yurand of Spichow. If she is not his daughter, it is not our fault—but rather it is the hand of God, who wished to place Yurand in our power."

Sigfried and the two lesser brethren bowed their heads, indicating their readiness to bear witness in case of necessity. They again exchanged looks, for that was more than they expected—to seize Yurand, keep his daughter, and, apparently, also keep his promise! What other man was able to do it?

But Yurand threw himself on his knees and began to implore, by all the holy relics of Malborg, and then by the ashes of his father and mother, to return to him his daughter, and not to act like an impostor and traitor, who breaks his oath and promise. There was so much despair and truth in his voice that some of the men present began to suspect some plot, while others thought that perhaps some magician had really substituted another girl for Danusia.

"God sees your treachery!" exclaimed Yurand. "I adjure you by the wounds of Christ! Give me my daughter!" And rising, bent like a bow, he approached Danefeldt as if wishing to embrace his knees. There was madness in the gleam of his eyes; in his voice were heard alternately pain, alarm, despair and menace.

Danefeldt, hearing himself publicly charged with treachery and imposition, began to breathe quicker and quicker, and, finally, wrath flushed his face, and desiring to try his unfor-

tunate foe to the uttermost, approached him, and bending over his ear, said through his clenched teeth:

"If I do give her to you, it will be with my brood——"

At the same moment Yurand began to roar like a wounded bull. With both hands he seized Danefeldt and raised him high in the air. Then a piercing cry resounded in the hall: "Have mercy!"

In an instant the body of the commander was hurled to the floor with such force that the brain from the shattered skull splashed Siegfried and Rotger, who were standing nearest.

Yurand sprang to the side wall, where stood the weapons, seized a large two-handed sword and rushed like a whirlwind at the Germans, who stood petrified with amazement.

These people were used to wars, slaughter and blood, but even their hearts quailed, and after they had recovered from their momentary stupefaction, they fell back and scattered like a flock of sheep before a wolf.

The hall resounded with cries of horror, the stamping of feet, the fall of dishes, the howling of servants, and the roar of the bear, who, escaping from the jester, began to climb the high window.

Finally, at the other end of the room weapons began to flash, charging Yurand with their points. But he, without paying attention to anything, almost maddened, single handed fell upon the Germans, and a struggle commenced—a wild, unheard of struggle, resembling more a slaughter than a regular combat. The young and impetuous Gottfried was the first to make a stand against Yurand; but with a lightning-like stroke of the sword the latter cut off his head, with the shoulder blade and arm. Next fell the captain of the archers, then the castle steward, Von Bracht, and the Englishman Herog, who, though he did not understand what was taking place, nevertheless sympathized with Yurand, and did not unsheath his sword until Danefeldt had fallen.

Others, seeing the terrible strength and desperation of Yurand, formed into a mass to present a united resistance; but this process led only to more bitter results.

With his hair standing on end, his terrible eyes, all reddened with blood, and breathing death, frenzied, almost insane, Yurand fell upon them, breaking, tearing and cutting with terrible swings of the sword the closely formed crowd, mowing them down like a whirlwind razing a clump of bushes and trees.

Again a moment of alarm followed, when it seemed that the terrible Mazovi would slaughter all the people in the hall;

and as a howling pack of hounds cannot overcome the wild boar without the aid of the archer, even so the armed Germans seemed unable to withstand the strength and ferocity of Yurand, and the struggle with him appeared like a struggle with death and ruin.

"Scatter! Surround him! Hit him from behind!" shouted Sigfried de Loewe.

The Germans scattered like a flock of starlings when a vulture descends among them, but they could not surround Yurand, who, in the heat of battle, instead of seeking a place for refuge, began to chase them along the walls, and every one he overtook died like one stricken by lightning.

The humiliation, despair and disappointment all turned into a thirst for blood and seemed to add tenfold to his native strength. He wielded the sword as he would a feather, with one hand, although the strongest of the Crusaders could only raise it with both hands. He sought neither life nor safety, nor even hope, but sought only revenge, and like a fire, or a river, which, breaking the dam, blindly annihilates every obstacle in its way, even so Yurand, terrible and blinded destroyer, was carrying away, breaking, trampling and extinguishing human life.

He could not be stricken from behind, first, because no one could catch up with him, and second, the ordinary soldiers feared to approach him even from behind, considering that if he turned around, no human power could save them from the jaws of death.

The more important knights were terror-stricken by the thought that an ordinary warrior could not work such ruin, and that they were dealing with a man who was being aided by superhuman power.

But old Sigfried, with brother Rotger, ran up to the gallery which stretched above the high windows, and began to call the others to follow their example. The call was responded to with such zeal that the narrow stairway was choked with people hastening to get to the gallery and strike the valiant knight from that vantage ground, the struggle below having resulted so disastrously. Finally, the last man slammed the door leading to the gallery behind him, and Yurand remained alone.

Shouts of joy and triumph came from the gallery, and suddenly heavy oak benches and iron torch stands were hurled at the knight. One of them struck him in the forehead above the eyebrow, covering his face with blood. At the same time the main entrance doors were flung open, and the servants,

summoned from the upper windows, came rushing in a crowd, armed with javelins, axes, bows, spears, ropes—in short, every conceivable weapon they could hastily seize.

And the maddened Yurand, with his left hand wiped the blood from his face that it might not interfere with his sight, and threw himself on the entire crowd.

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## CHAPTER VI.

In the evening, around the table in the same hall, sat old Sigfried de Loewe, who became temporary administrator of Stchitna in place of Danefeldt, and beside him sat Brother Rotger, De Bergow, the whilom prisoner of Yurand, and two noble youths who were soon to don the white cloak. A Winter storm howled without, shaking the lead-barred windows, causing the flames of the torches burning in iron stands to flicker, and from time to time sending a cloud of smoke from the fireplace into the hall.

Although they were gathered for consultation, silence reigned among the brethren, for they all waited for brother Sigfried to speak. The latter, resting his elbows on the table, with his gray head in his hands, sat gloomily, his face in the shade, and dismal thoughts in his soul.

"What are we to consult about?" finally asked Brother Rotger.

Sigfried raised his head, looked at the questioner, and awakening from his musing, answered:

"About the defeat; about our report to the Magister and the Chapter, and about the means of preventing harmful consequences to the Order resulting from our actions."

Then he fell into a reverie, but in a little while he turned around, sniffed, and said:

"There is the odor of blood here yet."

"No, commander," answered Rotger. "I ordered the floor washed, and the hall fumigated with sulphur. It is the odor of sulphur."

Sigfried cast a strange look at his comrades, and said:

"Lord, have pity on the soul of Brother Danefeldt and Brother Gottfried!"

They all understood that he appealed to God, because at the mention of sulphur hell came to his mind; they shuddered, and answered in chorus:

"Amen! Amen! Amen!"



For a moment only the howling of the wind and the trembling of the window bars were heard.

"Where are the bodies of the commander and brother Gottfried?" asked the old man.

"In the chapel. The priests are singing a requiem for their souls."

"Were the bodies placed in coffins?"

"They were; but the commander's head is covered, because the skull and the face are shattered."

"Where are the other corpses? Where are the wounded?"

"The corpses are on the snow, to get hardened before the coffins are made for them; and the wounded are in the hospital."

Sigfried again placed his hands to his temples.

"And that was done by one man!"

"God help the Order if it should come to a great war with that race of wolves!"

Rotger raised his eyes, as if calling something to mind, and said:

"I have heard the Saubian commander say to his brother, the Magister, at Wilno: 'If you do not cause a great war and annihilate them, then woe to us and to our people!'"

"May God grant us such a war! May He help us to meet them!" said one of the noble lay brethren.

Sigfried looked fixedly at the youth, as though he wished to say: "Even to-day you could have met one of them;" but seeing the frail little figure of the lay brother, or perhaps remembering that, notwithstanding his reputed courage, he himself had been disinclined to go to certain destruction, he dropped the conversation, and asked:

"Who has seen Yurand?"

"I have seen him," answered De Bergow.

"Is he alive?"

"Yes; he lies in the same net in which we have enmeshed him. When he recovered a little, the servants wished to dispatch him, but the chaplain interfered."

"It must not be done. Among his own people he is a man of note. There would be a hue and cry raised," answered Sigfried. "But what happened cannot be concealed, for there were too many witnesses."

"What, then, shall we say, and what shall we do?" asked De Bergow.

Sigfried began to muse, and finally said:

"You, noble Count de Bergow, go to the Magister in Malborg. You have languished in captivity as Yurand's prisoner;

besides, you are a guest of the Order, and as such, having no necessity of defending the Crusaders, you will be believed. Tell him everything that you have seen; that Danefeldt, rescuing a girl from the frontier highwaymen, and thinking her to be Yurand's daughter, notified him; that the latter came to Stchitna, and—you know the rest——”

“Pardon me, pious commander,” said De Bergow; “I have gone through terrible imprisonment at Spichow, and as your guest would be glad to bear witness in your favor. But, to satisfy my conscience, tell me, was not Yurand's daughter really in Stchitna, and was it not Danefeldt's treachery that led to the madness of her terrible father?”

For a moment Sigfried hesitated. His nature was imbued with a deep hatred for the Polish race, and his ferocity exceeded even Danefeldt's; he was rapacious in everything concerning the Order, was proud, covetous, but he was a stranger to falsehood. The greatest grief and affliction of his life were occasioned by the fact that of late the affairs of the Order, in consequence of the lack of discipline, the corruption, and the influences that prevailed, had become so complicated that falsehood had come to be the chief prop of the Order. The question, therefore, touched the most sensitive part of his soul, and it was some time before he finally answered:

“Danefeldt stands before God, who is judging him; and you, count, if you are asked about your conjectures, may answer what you please; if, however, the question will be regarding what you have seen yourself, then you will say that before the madman was bound with the net, you had seen nine corpses, not counting the wounded, and that you have seen on this floor the corpses of Danefeldt, brother Gottfried, Von Bracht, the Englishman, and two noble youths. Lord, grant them eternal peace! Amen!”

“Amen! Amen!” again repeated the lay brethren.

“Tell them, also,” added Sigfried, “that, although Danefeldt wished to subdue the enemy of the Order, Yurand was the first to draw the sword.”

“I will relate only that which I have seen with my own eyes,” answered De Bergow.

“We will meet about midnight in the chapel to pray for the souls of the dead,” said Sigfried, and he extended his hand to De Bergow in token of gratefulness, and also of leave-taking, for he wished to remain alone with brother Rotger, whom he loved and respected, for further consultation. After the departure of Bergow, he dismissed the two youths, telling them to look after the work of digging the graves for the fallen ser-

vants. And when the door closed behind them, he quickly turned to Rotger and said:

"Listen to what I will tell you: There is but one way of keeping the girl's presence here secret from the world."

"That is not difficult," answered Rotger; "no one knew of it except Danefeldt, ourselves, and the nun who is watching over her. The people who brought her from the forest castle were hanged by Danefeldt's order. There were some in the garrison who suspected treachery, but they were baffled by the girl who was brought here, and do not know now whether there was a mistake on our part, or she was really substituted by some magician."

"That is well," said Sigfried.

"And I, noble commander, thought that the guilt might be thrown on Danefeldt, since he is dead——"

"And confess before the world that in peaceful times, and while we were allied to the Prince of Mazovia, we stole from his castle the favorite ward of the princess? No, by God, that cannot be! We were seen together with Danefeldt at the Mazovian castle, and the Great Hospitaler, the relative of the deceased, knows that we have always acted together. If we should blame Danefeldt, he will seek to avenge his memory."

"Then we must consider the matter," said Rotger.

"We will consider, and try to find a way out of the difficulty; otherwise, woe to us! If we release his daughter, she herself will say that the people who stole her brought her directly to Stchitna."

"Yes."

"God is my witness that I fear not only the responsibility. The prince will complain to the King of Poland, and their envoys will not fail to raise a clamor in all the courts about our violence, our treachery, our crimes. God only knows what the Order may suffer thereby!"

"And if she disappears, will we not be blamed?" asked Rotger.

"No! Brother Danefeldt was a man with foresight. You remember that he made it a condition of her release that Yurand write to the prince that he was going to ransom her from highwaymen, and that she was not here?"

"That is true. But how will we explain the occurrence of to-day?"

"We will say that we knew that Yurand was seeking his child, and as we rescued from highwaymen a girl who could not explain who she was, we informed Yurand of it. We thought that she was his daughter, but when, on his arrival, he

saw the strange girl, he became enraged, and, actuated by the evil spirit, spilt more innocent blood than is spilt in many combats."

"Verily," answered Rotger, "wisdom and worldly experience speak with your lips. The evil deeds of Danefeldt, though they fall upon him alone, would forever be charged against the Order—consequently against all of us, the Chapter and the Magister. But thus our innocence will be proved, and the guilt will fall upon Yurand, Polish wickedness, and their connection with the infernal powers."

"And then let him who will judge us—the Pope or the Roman Caesar."

"Yes!"

After a few moments' silence, Brother Rotger asked:

"And what shall we do with Yurand's girl?"

"Let us consult."

"Give her to me."

"No! Listen, young brother! Where the Order is involved we must spare neither men, women, or even ourselves. Danefeldt was chastised by the hand of God, because he wished not only to avenge the wrongs of the Order, but also to satisfy his passions."

"You are unjust to me," said Rotger.

"Do not spare yourselves," interrupted Sigfried, "for your bodies and souls have become effeminate, and some time the knee of that hard race will press on your breast, so that you will never rise again."

For the first time he buried his head in his hands, but was apparently discoursing with his own conscience, and was only thinking of himself, for in a moment he added:

"Upon me also weigh human blood, pain, and many tears—I, too, when the Order was concerned, and when I saw that force alone would not help, did not hesitate to employ other means. But when I appear before God, I will tell Him, 'I did it for the Order, and for myself I have chosen this!'"

Saying which, he loosened the dark waist at his breast, disclosing a hair-cloth shirt.

Then he caught hold of his temples, raised his eyes, and exclaimed:

"Renounce all pleasure and dissipation! Temper your bodies and hearts, for I see now the white of eagle feathers in the air, and the claws of an eagle stained with the blood of the Crusaders—"

His words were interrupted by such a fierce guest of the storm that one of the upper gallery windows burst open with

a crash, and the hall was filled with the howling and whistling of the snow storm, and a shower of snowflakes descended on their heads.

"In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost! It is a bad night!" said the old Crusader.

"A night of evil spirits," answered Rotger.

"Are the priests praying at the body of Danefeldt?"

"Yes."

"He died impenitent. Lord have mercy on him!"

For a few moments both remained silent. Then Rotger called the servants, who closed the window, relit the torches, and when they had departed, he asked:

"What will you do with Yurand's daughter? Will you take her with you to Tusborg?"

"Yes; I will take her to Tusborg and do with her what the good of the Order demands."

"And what shall I do?"

"Have you daring enough in your soul?"

"What reason have you to doubt it?"

"I do not doubt it, for I know you, and love you for your bravery, as if you were my own son. Go to the court of the Mazovian prince and tell him everything as we have agreed."

"And doom myself to certain destruction?"

"If your destruction will increase the glory of the Cross and of the Order, then you must do it. But, no; destruction does not await you. They do not wrong their guests. Some one may, perchance, challenge you, as that young knight challenged us all. But that is not so dreadful."

"May God grant it! But still, I might be seized and thrown into a dungeon."

"They will not do it. Remember that there is a letter from Yurand to the prince; besides, you are going to complain against him. You will tell the truth about what has happened at Stchitna, and they must believe you. You must dwell on the fact that we were the first to inform him that we had rescued some girl; the first to invite him to see her; and when he came he went mad, killed the commander and a large number of our people. What can they say to this? The news of Danefeldt's death will spread through Mazovia. Under such circumstances, their complaints will be laid aside. They will seek Yurand's daughter, it is true; but since Yurand himself wrote that she was not with us, we will not be suspected. We must call audacity to our aid, and shut their mouths. They will think that if we were guilty we would not dare to come to them."

"True. After the interment of Danefeldt I shall start."

"God bless you, my son! When we have done everything necessary, they will not be so persistent, but will even be compelled to repudiate Yurand to prevent our saying, 'That is how they treat our people!'"

"And thus we must complain at all the courts."

"The Great Hospitaller will not fail to do it, both for the good of the Order and for his relative, Danefeldt."

"But if that Spichow devil should recover and receive his liberty?"

Sigfried sullenly fixed his eyes in the distance, then said slowly:

"Even if he receives his liberty, he will not utter a word of complaint against the Order."

And he began to instruct Rotger what to say and what demands to make at the Mazovian court.

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## CHAPTER VII.

Rumors of the tragic events, in which Yurand had so conspicuously figured, reached Warsaw before Brother Rotger and roused wonder and alarm. Neither the Prince nor any of the courtiers could surmise what had really happened. It was but lately that Nicholas of Dlugolias was to go to Malborg with the prince's bitter complaint of the abduction of Danusia by the turbulent frontier commanders, and the almost stern demand of her release, when suddenly a letter came from the lord of Spichow with the information that his daughter had not been stolen by the Crusaders, but by ordinary frontier highwaymen, and that she would soon be released for a ransom.

As a result the envoy was not sent, for it never occurred to any one that the Crusaders had compelled Yurand to write such a letter under threat of killing his child. It was difficult to understand what had happened, for heretofore the vagabonds, whether subjects of the prince or of the Crusaders, had attacked each other in the summer time, and not in the winter, when they could be traced on the snow. They had principally attacked merchants or robbed villages, taking prisoners or driving off the flocks, but that they should have dared to carry off the ward of the prince, and she, too, the daughter of a powerful knight who inspired everybody with terror, exceeded the measure of human comprehension. But to offset these

considerations there was the letter of Yurand, with his own seal, and this time delivered by a man well known to come from Spichow. Under such circumstances all suspicions fell to the ground. But the wrath of the prince had no bounds, and he ordered that the highwaymen along the frontier of the duchy be vigorously pursued, at the same time inviting the Prince of Plotzk to do the same thing, and not to spare the turbulent villains.

At that very time the news came of the Stchitna occurrence. Traveling from mouth to mouth, it arrived magnified tenfold. It was said that Yurand, appearing at the castle with six companions, had forced the gate and worked such havoc that scarcely any one of the garrison had escaped alive; that it had been necessary to send for help to the nearest castles, summon the flower of the knighthood and armed detachments of soldiers, who, only after a two days' siege, had succeeded in forcing their way into the castle and killing Yurand and his companions.

It was rumored that this army would probably cross the frontiers of the duchy, and that a great war would inevitably ensue.

The prince, who knew well how important it was to the Magister that the two Mazovian duchies should stand aside in case of a collision with the King of Poland, did not give credence to the rumors, although it was no secret to him that should the Crusaders declare war against him or against Dmowit of Platzk, the Poles could not be restrained. And such a war the Magister feared. He knew that a war must come, but tried to avert it, firstly, because he himself was a peaceful man; and, secondly, in order to try conclusions with Yagella, it was necessary to gather the forces which the Order had not theretofore placed on a war footing, and at the same time to assure himself of the help of the monarchs and knighthood, not only of Germany, but of the entire West.

Thus the prince did not apprehend a war, but wished to know what had happened at Stchitna, what had become of Danusia, and wished to learn all the news of the frontier. Though he could not tolerate the Crusaders, he was glad when the captain of the archers reported that a knight of the Order had arrived and was seeking an audience.

The prince received him haughtily, and though he recognized the visitor as one of the brethren who was at the forest castle, he pretended not to know him and asked him who he was, whence he came and what brought him to Warsaw.

"I am Brother Rotger," answered the Crusader, "and lately had the honor of bowing to the knees of your grace."

"Why, then, being a Crusader, do you not wear the insignia of the Order?"

The knight explained that he had discarded the white cloak because if he had not the Mazovian knighthood would surely have seized and killed him. Everywhere else in the entire world, in all the kingdoms and duchies, the white cloak gives security, and assures good-will and hospitality; but in the duchy of Mazovia the cross dooms its wearer to certain destruction.

But the prince angrily interrupted him.

"Not the cross," he said, "for that is the emblem of our faith also, but your lawlessness. And if you are given a better reception elsewhere it is because they do not know you so well."

Seeing that the knight was confused by these words, he asked:

"You were at Stchitna; do you know what happened there?"

"I was at Stchitna and know what happened there," answered Rotger, "and I came here not as an envoy, but solely because the experienced and pious commander of Tusborg said to me: 'Our Magister loves the pious prince and believes in his sense of justice; therefore, while I am hastening to Malborg, you go to Mazovia and lay before the prince the injustice, the humiliation and misfortune we have suffered. Of course, the just sovereign will not approve of the act of the disturber of the peace and the pitiless offender, who has spilled so much Christian blood, that one would think he was a servant of Satan and not of Christ.'"

Brother Rotger then began to relate the occurrences at Stchitna—how they had rescued a girl from highwaymen, how they had invited Yurand to see if she was not his daughter; how, instead of being grateful to them, he had killed Danefeldt, Brother Gottfried, the Englishman, von Bracht, without counting the servants; how the Crusaders, remembering the commandments of God, and not wishing to kill, were compelled finally to entoil him in a net; how Yurand had turned his weapon against himself and inflicted on himself dreadful wounds; how, finally, after the slaughter by Yurand, people not only in the castle but also in the city, had heard at midnight a strange laughter and voices calling in the air: "Our Yurand! The vanquisher of the Cross! The destroyer of the innocent! Our Yurand!"

The entire story, especially the last words of the Crusader,



produced a strong impression on those present. There was a deep silence; the listeners were terror-stricken. What if Yurand had really summoned to his aid the powers of hell! But the princess, who was present, and whose love for Danusia left a growing sadness in her heart, suddenly turned to Rotger and asked:

"You say, sir, that you thought that the rescued girl was Yurand's daughter, and for that reason you summoned Yurand?"

"Yes, gracious lady," answered Rotger.

"How, then, could you have thought so when you had seen the real daughter of Yurand by my side at the forest castle?"

Brother Rotger was unprepared for such a question, and became confused.

The prince rose from his seat and looked sternly at the Crusader, while Nicholas of Dlugolias, Mrokota and Yasko of Yagelnitzi and other Mazovian knights immediately came forward and in turn questioned him in stern voices:

"How could you have thought so? Speak, German! How could it have happened?"

Brother Rotger held himself erect and then impressively answered:

"We monks do not raise our eyes on women. At the forest castle there were a number of ladies at the side of the gracious princess, but which of them was the daughter of Yurand no one of us knew."

"Danefeldt knew," said Nicholas of Dlugolias. "He even spoke to her at the chase."

"Danefeldt is before God," answered Rotger. "I will only say this of him: that the day after his demise we found on his grave roses in full bloom, which, as it was winter, no human hand could have placed there."

There was again silence.

"When did you learn of the stealing of the girl?" asked the prince.

"The very daring of the act brought the news to us as well as to you. And so, on learning of it, we held a thanksgiving mass that it was a child of one of the courtiers and not one of your grace's children that had been stolen."

"And yet it is strange that you should have mistaken that girl for the daughter of Yurand."

To which Rotger answered:

"Danefeldt said thus: 'The devil often turns traitor to his servants; perhaps he changed the girls.'"

"Common highwaymen could not forge the letter of Father Kaleb and the seal of Yurand. Who, then, could have done it?"

"The evil spirit."

And again no one could find an answer.

Rotger looked attentively at the prince and said:

"Verily, your questions pierce my heart like swords, because there is a ring of distrust and suspicion in them. But I, relying on justice and the power of truth, ask your grace: Did Yurand himself suspect us? And if he did suspect us, why did he seek the highwaymen all along the frontier, with the purpose of releasing her with a ransom, before ever we had called him to Stchitna?"

"That is true," said the prince. "Even if you conceal something from men, you can conceal nothing from God. I suspected you at first, but later—later, I saw that I was mistaken."

"The light of truth will always conquer darkness!" exclaimed Rotger. And he cast a triumphant look around him.

Of course, the Crusaders had more wit and were more resourceful than the Poles, who would always be the prey of the Order, even as flies are the prey of spiders.

Throwing off his insinuating manner, Rotger approached the prince and began in an affecting voice:

"Indemnify us, sir, for our losses, for the injustice which we have borne, for our tears and our blood! That offspring of hell was your subject; then, in the name of God, from whom kings and princes receive their authority, in the name of justice and the Cross, you must recompense us for our injuries and our blood."

The prince looked at him perplexed.

"By God!" he said, "your audacity astounds me! What do you wish? If Yurand had spilled your blood in madness, am I responsible for his act?"

"Sir, he was your subject," answered the Crusader. "In your duchy there are his lands, his estates, his castle, in which he had imprisoned servants of the Order. Let those estates, those lands, and that godless fortification be henceforth the property of the Order. True, that will not worthily repay us for the noble blood spilled; true, it will not resurrect the dead, but it will at least partially soften God's wrath, and wipe off the stain of ignominy which would otherwise fall on your duchy. Oh, sir! The Order owns everywhere lands and castles with which the kindness and piety of Christian sovereigns have endowed it; but here the Order has not even a span of land. For our losses, which call to God for vengeance, let

us be thus slightly rewarded, that we may say that here, too, live people who have the fear of God in their hearts!"

This appeal caused the prince to become even more perplexed, and after a long silence he said:

"Scourges of Christ! The Order exists here only through the grace of my ancestors! You are not content with the provinces and cities which once belonged to us and our people, and are yours now! Yurand's daughter is alive; no one has reported to you her death; and yet you wish to seize the orphan's marriage portion, and reward yourselves for your losses with an orphan's bread!"

"Sir, you admit our losses," said Rotger; "reward us, then, as your conscience and sense of justice dictates."

And again his soul was gladdened, and he thought: "Now, not only will they cease complaining, but will seek to justify themselves, and try to extricate themselves from the affair. No one will blame us, and our glory, like the cloak of the Order, will remain stainless."

At that moment the unexpected voice of Nicholas of Dlugolias was heard.

"You are charged with rapacity, and God knows that the charge is just, for even in this affair you are more concerned about gain than the honor of the Order."

"That is true!" answered the Mazovian knights in chorus.

The Crusader took a few steps forward, proudly raised his head, and casting a haughty glance around, said:

"I came here not as an envoy, but as a witness of the awful tragedy, and as a knight of the Order who is willing to defend the honor of the Order with the last drop of his blood. And whoever, contrary to the word of Yurand himself, will dare to charge the Order with stealing his daughter—let him pick up this knightly pledge and submit himself to divine justice."

With these words he threw down his glove, while the Mazovian knights stood in deep silence. Many of them would be only too glad to break their swords on the German's neck, but they all feared divine justice. It was no secret that Yurand had declared that his child had not been stolen by the knights of the Order. Every one of the Mazovian knights felt that Rotger would certainly come out victorious.

He became more self-confident, and placing his arms akimbo, asked:

"Is there one here who will pick up the glove?"

At that moment a knight, whose coming had been unnoticed, and who, standing in the doorway, had been listening to the

conversation, stepped into the middle of the room, picked up the glove, and said:

"I accept your challenge!"

Saying which he threw his own glove in the face of Rotger and spoke in a voice which rang like thunder amid the general silence:

"Before God, before the worthy prince, and before the valiant knighthood of this land, I tell you, Crusader, that you are barking like a dog! You lie, contrary to justice and the truth, and I challenge you to single combat, on foot or on horseback, with spear or axe, short or long sword, and not for bondage but to the death!"

In the silence that followed a fly could have been heard if it were flying across the room.

All eyes turned on Rotger and the challenging knight, who was not recognized at first, because his helmet almost entirely concealed the upper part of his face, and threw a shadow on the lower part.

The Crusader was no less surprised than the others. Confusion and furious anger flashed across his face, like lightning across the sky. He grasped the glove and asked:

"Who are you who dare to try divine justice?"

The knight loosened the buckle under his chin, removed his helmet, and answered:

"Zbishko of Bogdanetz! the husband of Yurand's daughter!"

They were all surprised; Rotger, among the others, for besides the prince and princess, Father Wyshanok and de Lorche, no one knew of the marriage of Danusia, and the Crusaders were certain that the girl had no other natural defender than her father.

"On the honor of a knight, I reiterate his charge. Whoever dares to doubt it—there is my glove!"

Rotger, who knew no fear, and whose heart was at that moment boiling with rage, would have picked up the glove, but remembering that the man who made the challenge was a powerful knight, and, besides, a relative of Count Heldern, restrained himself, the more so because the prince, contracting his brow, said:

"You cannot pick up that glove, for I, too, declare that the young knight has spoken the truth."

The Crusader bowed and said to Zbishko:

"If you wish, the combat shall be on foot, and with axes, at a measured distance."

"I have offered that myself," answered Zbishko.

"Lord, may the just one be victorious!" exclaimed the Mazovian knights.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

The whole court were apprehensive of the result. Zbishko was loved by everybody, and Yurand's letter plainly stated that justice was on the side of the Crusaders. On the other hand, it was well known that Rotger was one of the most famous knights of the Order. Von Krist, his armor-bearer, had related to the Mazovian nobles, designedly perhaps, that his master, before becoming an armed monk, had once occupied a place of honor at the table of the Crusaders, at which table only the most famous knights in the world were permitted to sit—such as had taken part in the crusades to the Holy Land or victoriously fought giants, dragons or the all-powerful necromancers. Hearing such tales of Von Krist, and the boastful assurance that his master, with misericorde and axe, had frequently fought single handed five adversaries, the Mazovian grew anxious. Some said: "Ah, if Yurand were here, he would master even two such as he. He never met a German in battle but who was thrashed by him. But that boy! The German is older, more experienced, and by far the stronger!" Others regretted that they had not accepted the challenge, asserting that if it were not for the letter of Yurand they would have done so. "But divine judgment is awful." And to console themselves they recalled the names of the Polish knights who at court tournaments and combats had gained innumerable victories over Western knights, especially Zavissha of Garbow, with whom no Christian knight could measure strength.

But there were also some who hopefully looked on Zbishko, saying: "He is a foe not to be despised; it is said that he once gave some Germans a good drubbing."

Especially were they emboldened by the conduct of Zbishko's armiger, Glawa. On the eve of the combat, when Von Krist had enlarged upon the unheard of victories of Rotger, the impetuous young Czech caught him by the beard, threw back his head, and said: "If you are not ashamed to lie in the presence of people, then look above, for God, too, hears you." And he held him thus as long as it would take to read the Lord's Prayer.

Von Krist, finally releasing himself, began to ask the

Czech about his origin, and finding that he belonged to the nobility challenged him to combat with axes.

The Mazovii were cheered by the conduct of the Czech and confidently said: "Such people will not limp on a combat, and if the truth and God is on their side, these curs, the Crusaders, will have their bones broken." But Rotger had so unnerved them that the possibility that the truth might not be on their side still remained, and was shared even by the prince.

On the eve of the combat the prince summoned Zbishko, and in the presence of the princess asked him:

"Are you certain that God will be on your side? How do you know that it was they who stole Danusia? Did Yurand tell you anything? Do you see this? It is Yurand's letter, and the handwriting is that of the priest Kaleb, and the seal; and in this letter he says that it was not the Crusaders. What did he tell you?"

"He told me, also, that it was not the Crusaders who stole her."

"How, then, can you risk your life and submit to divine judgment?"

Zbishko was silent, while his jaws trembled and his eyes filled with tears.

"I know nothing, master," he finally said. "I left here with Yurand, and on the way confessed that I had married his daughter. He chided me at first, saying that it was a sin against God, and when I said that it was the will of the Almighty, he became calm and forgave me. He repeated all along that it was no other than the Crusaders who had stolen Danusia, but afterward I do not know myself what happened. The woman who brought some medicines to the forest castle arrived at Spichow with another envoy. Yurand locked himself in with them. I do not know what they spoke about, but after their conversation not even the servants of Yurand could recognize him. All he said to us was, 'It was not the Crusaders.' De Bergow and the other prisoners he released—Heaven knows why!—and departed, taking neither servant nor armiger with him. He said that he was going to ransom Danusia from highwaymen, and commanded me to wait. And I waited. The tidings came that he had killed many Germans, and finally fell himself. Oh, gracious prince! The Spichow ground burned the soles of my feet, and I nearly went mad. I gathered my men, intending to avenge the death of Yurand, but the priest Kaleb said: 'You cannot take the fortress, and it is not for you to declare war. Go to the prince; perhaps he or those about him know something about Danusia.' And I came

here, arriving in time to hear that cur lie about the wrongs done the Order and the ferocity of Yurand.

"Master," Zbishko continued, "I picked up his glove because I had already challenged him, and though I knew little regarding them, yet I know that they are infernal liars, without shame, honor or faith! Think of it; they themselves killed De Fursi, and threw the blame on my armiger. I swear, by God, that they slaughtered him like an ox and then had the effrontery to demand revenge and compensation of your grace. And now who will vouch that they did not lie to Yurand, and are not lying now? I know not where Danusia is, but I challenged him; and even though I were certain that in the contest I would lose my life, I would still fight him, for I would rather die than live without my love, without my dear Danusia!"

In great agitation Zbishko tore the net-like cap from his head, so that his hair fell loosely over his face, which he covered with his hands, and began to weep so bitterly that the princess, touched to the depth of her soul by the loss of Danusia and his grief, placed her hand on his head and said:

"May God help, console and bless you!"

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## CHAPTER IX.

The prince did not oppose the combat; in fact, that would have been contrary to the prevailing custom. He only insisted that Rotger should write to the Magister and to Siegfried de Loewe, informing them that he had been the first to issue the challenge, and as a result was about to fight the husband of Yurand's daughter, who, however, had previously challenged him. The Crusader justified himself before the Magister, saying that the contest was in defense of the Order, to disperse some terrible accusations against it; that these accusations, if permitted to pass without refutation, would disgrace the Order, and that he, Rotger, was always ready to defend the Order by the sacrifice of his blood.

The letter was immediately taken by one of the pages of the knight to the frontier, whence it was to be forwarded by post, which system of transmission the Crusaders had invented and introduced among themselves long before other countries.

Meanwhile, in the court-yard of the castle the snow was rammed down to prevent the combatants' feet from sinking or slipping on the smooth surface. Unwonted silence reigned

throughout the castle. The alarm that had seized the knights and ladies of the court kept every one awake the night before the combat. The subject was earnestly discussed, and the general opinion was to the effect that a combat on horse and with spears, and even with swords, often resulted only in wounds, whereas a combat on foot, and with the terrible axe, usually led to fatal assaults.

The sympathy of everybody in the castle was with Zbishko, but the warmer the attachment any one had either for Zbishko or Danusia, the greater was the alarm with which he recalled what had been said of the fame and soldierly adroitness of the Crusaders. Many women passed all night in the church, where Wyshonok was kept busy in the confessional. Looking at the boyish face of the young knight, the women said: "But he is almost a child! How can they allow such a young head to be placed under the German's sword?" And they prayed more fervently that God might help him. But when at day-break he rose and passed the chapel to don his armor, the female hearts took courage. The head and face of Zbishko were really boyish, but his body was as powerful as that of an adult capable of meeting the strongest man.

The combat was to take place in the court-yard, which was surrounded by a balcony.

In the morning the prince, with the princess and the children, seated themselves in the middle of the balcony, whence they could view the entire court-yard. On both sides of them sat the more important courtiers, noble women and knights. Every nook and corner were occupied, the servants stood behind the ramparts formed by the piled-up snow; some were seated on the cornices and even on the roof. Even among the servants was heard, "May God help our man!"

The day was cold, humid, but clear. The daws which nested on the roof, frightened by the unwonted stir, circled above the castle. Notwithstanding the cold, the people were warm from the agitation, and at the first sound of the trumpet, announcing the appearance of the antagonists, the hearts of the people began to beat.

The opponents entered from opposite ends of the arena, and stopped at the edge. The spectators held their breath, each one thinking that in a little while two souls would fly to the threshold of the judgment seat of God, and two corpses would remain on the snow. At this thought the cheeks of the women turned pale, while the men did not take their eyes from the combatants; each spectator tried to guess, from the conduct



and the armament of the two knights, which was likely to come out victorious.

The Crusader wore an enameled cuirass, similar housings, a helmet with raised visor, and a magnificent crest of peacock plumes.

The breast, sides and back of Zbishko were covered with a magnificent Milan cuirass obtained in his victory over the Frisians. On his head he wore a helmet, open and without plumes, and on his feet boots made of bull's hide.

In his left hand each combatant held his shield. On the upper part of that of the Crusader was painted a checker-board, while on the lower part were three lions standing on their hind legs; on that of Zbishko was a "blunt horseshoe." Each in his right hand held a terrible axe, set on a blackened oaken helve, longer than the arm of a grown man.

They were escorted by the armigers, Glawa and Von Krist, each in a dark, iron cuirass, bearing an axe and a shield. Von Krist's coat-of-arms was a furze-bush; that of Glawa the head of a bull, with a poised poniard half buried in his eye.

The trumpet sounded a second time; after the third, the combatants were to advance to the attack. Now there was a small distance between them, covered with gray ashes, above which death hovered like an ominous bird.

Before the third signal was given, Rotger approached the posts, between which sat the family of the prince. Raising his steel-encased head, he said in a voice so loud that it was heard at the farthest ends of the balcony:

"I take God to witness, and you, worthy sir, and the whole knighthood of this land, that I will not be guilty of the blood that will soon be shed here."

The hearts of the listeners contracted, so confident seemed the Crusader of his victory. But the simple-minded Zbishko turned to the Czech and said:

"How offensive and boasting of that Crusader! It would become him better if he said it after my death. But that braggart wears peacock plumes on his helmet. I vowed at first to obtain three of them, and then to get as many as there are fingers on my hands. And God is sending them."

"Master," said the Czech, picking up a handful of ashes mixed with snow, to prevent the axe from slipping from his hand, "may be, with the aid of God, I shall be able to quickly master that Prussian fellow. Permit me, then, if not to attack the Crusader, at least to put my axe between his legs and throw him to the ground."

"God forbid!" Zbishko exclaimed. "You would disgrace both yourself and me."

The third trumpet call sounded, on hearing which the two armigers quickly and eagerly sprang toward each other, while the knights neared each other, slowly and gravely, as became their calling and dignity.

Little attention was paid to the armigers, but experienced people, and the servants who looked at them, understood at once what great advantages were on the side of Glawa. In the hands of the German was a heavy axe, but the movements of his shield were therefore slower. From under his cuirass were seen his legs, long but thin, and not so muscular as the powerful legs of the Czech, draped in tight trousers. Glawa's attack was so impetuous that Von Krist was compelled to retreat almost from the first moment. The spectators saw at once that one of the combatants rushed at the other like a whirlwind—that he was pressing, striking like a thunderbolt; while the other, feeling death hovering over him, was only defending himself and warding off the fatal stroke. The braggart who went into the combat only because it was unavoidable, understood that his boastful and careless words brought him to a single combat with a terrible adversary whom he must avoid at any cost; and now, when he saw that every stroke of his adversary was vigorous enough to kill a bull, he lost his wits. He had almost forgotten that it was not enough to receive the blows with his shield, but that it was necessary to inflict equally powerful ones. He only saw above him the swings of the axe and thought that each one might be the last.

Covering himself with his shield, he involuntarily closed his eyes with a feeling of alarm, doubting if he would be able to open them again. Now and then he struck out without hope of hitting his adversary, and only raised his shield higher and higher to cover his head.

He finally became exhausted, while the Czech inflicted even more terrible blows. As the chips fly from a pine tree under the blows of the woodchopper, so the scales of the German's cuirass began to fall under the blows of the Czech. The upper end of the shield was bent and cracked, the right shoulder-piece, with the cut and bloody strap, was already on the ground. Von Krist's hair stood on end, and he was seized with mortal fear. Once and again he struck the Czech's shield with all his might, but, considering that there was no escape for him from his powerful adversary, and that he could only be

saved by uncommon exertion, he suddenly threw himself, with all his weight of body and armor, under the feet of Glawa.

Both fell and struggled, rolling on the snow. But the Czech was soon on top, exerting himself to restrain the desperate movements of his adversary; finally, he pressed with his knee the iron net covering his abdomen and drew from under his belt a three-edged misericorde.

"Have mercy!" whispered Von Krist, looking into the eyes of the Czech.

But Glawa, instead of answering, buried the dagger into the neck of the unfortunate German, then raised his axe, and, leaning on it, began to look on the harder and more stubborn struggle of his master with Brother Rotger.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Western knights had already become habituated to luxury and abundance, when the knights of Little Poland, Great Poland and Mazovia were yet leading an austere and abstemious mode of life. As a result, even strangers and people ill-disposed toward them were struck by their bodily strength and power of endurance. And it now appeared that Zbishko, in the strength of his arms and legs, was as much the superior of the Crusader as his armiger had proved himself superior to Von Krist. But in the dexterous handling of the weapons the young knight was considerably inferior to Rotger.

The choice of weapons was favorable to Zbishko, because it was impossible to fence with axes. In a combat with long or short swords one must know all the strokes and know how to parry them; and in that case the German would have had the upper hand; but now Zbishko himself, as well as the spectators, understood that there was before him an experienced and formidable combatant, who was apparently no novice in these tournaments.

At every stroke of Zbishko, Rotger put forth his shield, then slightly drew it back, so that the swing of the axe lost its force and had little effect on the smooth surface of the shield. At times he fell back, at others he plunged forward, but did it either calmly or so swiftly that the eye could not follow his movements.

The prince became alarmed, and the faces of the Mazovian knights showed anxiety: it seemed to them that the German was purposely playing with his antagonist. At times he even failed to protect himself with the shield; and when Zbishko swung his axe, he half turned aside so that the axe cleft the air. That was the most dangerous thing of all, for Zbishko

would then be likely to lose his equilibrium and fall to the ground, in which case his fate would be sealed.

The Czech, standing over the prostrate form of Von Krist, saw Zbishko's peril, and said to himself:

"By God! If master falls, I will strike the German between the shoulder-blades, so that he, too, falls."

Zbishko, however, did not fall. He had enormous power in his legs, which he spread to give him strength to resist each threatened strike and thus oppose with the whole weight of his body the force of the swing.

Rotger immediately noticed this method of resistance, and the spectators were mistaken in thinking that he took his adversary lightly. On the contrary, after the first few blows, when, notwithstanding his ability to handle the shield, his arm almost became numb, he understood that it would be no easy task to overcome the young man, and that unless he threw him by some dexterous movement the struggle might turn out to be a long one, and attended with considerable danger. He had reckoned that Zbishko would fall in one of his false strokes, but as that did not happen he became alarmed.

From under his steel visor he saw the distended nostrils and pressed lips of his adversary; saw his glittering eyes, and said to himself that the youth would surely become impetuous, lose his wits, and in his blindness would only think of inflicting blows instead of warding them off. But he was mistaken in this also.

Zbishko could not avoid the blows by a half turn, but he did not forget the shield, and when raising the axe did not expose himself more than was necessary. Apparently he doubled his attention, and, understanding the skill and experience of his adversary, he not only forgot nothing, but he concentrated all his thoughts on himself, became more wary, and his blows were seen to be delivered with more calculation, which could be the result not of passion but of cool ferocity.

Rotger, who had seen many wars and fought many combats, in the ranks of an army and in single combat, knew from experience that there were people who, like birds of prey, were naturally adapted for struggle and who guess that which others learn only by years of experience; he therefore at once concluded that he was dealing with one of these people. From the very first blows he understood that there was something in that young man reminding one of the vulture, which only sees a prey in its adversary and is only thinking of fastening its claws in it. Notwithstanding his strength, he also saw that Zbishko was in that respect his superior, and if he was

not exhausted before he delivered the fatal blow, the struggle with that terrible though less experienced boy might end fatally for him. Hence he decided to fight with the least expenditure of strength, pressed the shield to his breast, was less aggressive, summoned all the strength of his soul and arm for a decisive blow, and waited for a favorable moment.

The terrible struggle dragged beyond all measure. A deathly silence reigned on the balcony. Only from time to time was heard the clash or dull blow of the axe or helve against a shield. To the prince and princess, as well as the knights and courtiers, such a spectacle was not new, yet some feeling akin to honor possessed their hearts. Every one understood that victory would not entirely depend upon the exhibition of the greatest strength, dexterity or courage, but that in the struggle were manifest ferocity, great desperation and a still greater and more terrible thirst for revenge. On that smooth ground appeared before the judgment of God a bloody outrage, love, and immense grief on the one side, and on the other the dignity of the entire Order and a deep hatred.

Meanwhile the pale winter mist began to dissipate, and the rays of the sun lit up the blue cuirass of the Crusader and the silvery armor of Zbishko. The bell in the chapel sounded, and at the first stroke the flock of daws again rose from the roof of the castle, flapping their wings and croaking, as if rejoicing at the sight of blood and the corpse lying on the snow.

During the struggle Rotger had once looked at the corpse, and as his glance fell upon it for the second time he suddenly felt awfully lonely. All the eyes of those that looked on him were hostile. All prayers, wishes and silent vows that were made by the women were on the side of Zbishko. Besides, though the Crusader was certain that the Czech would not treacherously attack him from behind, yet the presence and proximity of that terrible figure caused him that involuntary alarm which one experiences in the presence of a wolf, a bear or a buffalo, from which one is unprotected by the iron grating of a cage. And he could not rid himself of that feeling, for the Czech, wishing to follow the course of the combat, shifted from place to place, bending his head and ominously looking through the visor of his helmet.

Finally the Crusader began to grow faint. He struck two short but terrible blows successively, aiming at the right arm of Zbishko, which the latter parried with his shield with such force that the axe trembled in the hand of Rotger, and he was compelled to retreat to save himself from falling. Thence-

forward he kept retreating. Not only was his strength exhausted, but also his calmness and patience.

Seeing his retreat, a shout of triumph broke forth from the breasts of the spectators, rousing in him wrath and despair.

The blows of the axe now fell oftener. The foreheads of the combatants were covered with perspiration, and a hoarse breathing escaped through their clenched teeth.

The tranquility of the spectators was broken by the shouts, now of a man, now of a woman:

"Strike him! God's chastisement! God help you!"

The prince, by a motion of the hand, attempted to suppress the noise, but he could not restrain his courtiers. The shouts grew louder; the children, crowding on the balcony, also began to shout, and some woman near the prince exclaimed in a sobbing voice:

"Strike for Danusia, Zbishko! For Danusia!"

But Zbishko needed no reminder of Danusia. He was certain that the Crusader had participated in her abduction, and, fighting with him, he wished to avenge her. But as a lover of contests, at this moment he only thought of the combat. The shout, however, reminded him of his loss. Love, grief and revenge added fire to his boiling blood. His heart wailed with the suddenly awakened pain, and he became intoxicated with martial ardor.

The Crusader could no longer follow and parry his terrible, lightning-like blows. Zbishko struck his shield with his own with such superhuman force that the German's arm suddenly became numb and fell to his side. In alarm and terror he fell back, and turned aside, but at the same time his eyes were blinded by the glitter of an axe, and some weight, like lightning, fell upon his shoulder.

A heartrending cry was heard—"Jesus!"—then Rotger retreated another step, and fell backward on the snow.

The noise and bustle that followed resembled that of a beehive, when the bees, warmed by the sun, begin to move and buzz. The knights ran down the stairway in crowds, the servants jumped over the snow mound to see the corpses. From every side came exclamations:

"Behold the judgment of God! Yurand has a fine heir! Honor and gratitude is due him! The axe is the thing for him!"

Others exclaimed: "Look and wonder! Yurand himself could not strike any better!"

There was soon a crowd around the corpse of Rotger, who lay on his back, his face almost as white as the snow, his

lips parted, and his shoulder, horribly cut from the neck to the very groin, was held only by a few muscles.

Some wondered at his stature, so much room did he occupy on the battlefield, and after his death he seemed even larger than in life; others wondered at the peacock crest, reflecting every imaginable hue on the snow; still others wondered at the cuirass, which was worth a whole village.

But Glawa, with two servants of Zbishko, was already approaching Rotger, to remove the accoutrements, while the knights surrounded Zbishko, extolling and praising him to the skies. They judged correctly when they said that his fame would glorify the whole Mazovian and Polish knighthood.

Meanwhile he was relieved of his axe and sword. Mrakota removed his helmet and placed his own red cap on his perspiring head.

Zbishko stood stupefied, breathing heavily, with burning eyes, and his face, pale from exhaustion and ferocity. He was caught under his arms and led to the prince and princess, who were waiting for him at the fireplace in a warmly heated room. Zbishko knelt before them, and when Wyshonok made the sign of the cross over him and prayed for the repose of the dead, the prince embraced the young knight and said:

"The eternal God decided your dispute and guided your hand, for which may His name be blessed. Amen!"

Then he turned to De Lorche and the others present and added:

"I take you, foreign knight, and you, sirs, to witness, and I bear witness myself, that they fought according to the law and custom, and that divine justice was dealt here in the same knightly manner as it is done everywhere."

The Mazovian knights received these words with a shout of welcome, and when they were explained to De Lorche he rose and declared that not only would he bear witness to the fact that everything had been conducted in a chivalrous and godly way, but that should any one at Malborg or at any reigning court dare to doubt it, he, De Lorche, would immediately challenge him to mortal combat, on horse or on foot, whether he were an ordinary knight or some giant or necromancer exceeding in his magic art Merlin himself.

Meanwhile the princess, bending over Zbishko, who was kneeling before her, said:

"Why do you not rejoice? Rejoice and thank God; for if He in His mercy guarded you against peril, He will continue to watch over you and will reward you with happiness."

And Zbishko answered:

"How can I rejoice, gracious lady! God gave me victory and permitted me to avenge myself on that Crusader; but Danusia is not returned to me, and I am as far from her as ever before."

"Your worst enemies, Danefeldt and Gottfried, are dead," answered the princess; "and of Siegfried they say that he is more just than they were, though he is cruel. And praise God for His mercy that this is so. And De Lorche said that if the Crusader falls he will take his body to Malborg and will intercede for Danusia before the Grand Magister himself. They will not dare to disobey him."

"May God grant health to De Lorche," said Zbishko. "I will also go to Malborg."

The princess was frightened by these words, as if Zbishko had said that he would go unarmed among wolves, entire packs of which infest the thick forests of Mazovia in winter.

"Why?" she exclaimed. "Do you wish to go to certain destruction? Immediately after the combat, neither De Lorche nor the letter sent by Rotger yesterday will help you. You will help no one, and will ruin yourself."

Zbishko rose, crossed his arms on his breast, and said:

"By God, I will go to Malborg and even beyond the sea! May Christ bless me! I will seek her as long as I have breath, until I perish. It is easier for me to fight Germans than for her to moan in a dungeon. Ay, far easier!"

He said this, as he always did when he recalled Danusia, with such agitation, with such pain, that his voice was often choked.

The princess understood that it would be futile to attempt to dissuade him, and that the only way to restrain him was to chain him and throw him into the underground dungeon.

However, Zbishko could not depart immediately. A knight of that period need not have regarded any obstacles, but it was forbidden to violate the knightly custom which commanded the victor to remain on the battleground till midnight in token of his remaining master of the arena, and also to indicate that he was ready for another combat should the relatives or friends of the vanquished choose to challenge him. This custom was kept even by armies, often at the cost of advantages which could be gained by haste after a victory. Zbishko did not even attempt to free himself from the inflexible law, and after partaking of some food, again donned his armor and remained till midnight in the court-yard of the castle, under a gloomy winter sky, awaiting the foe who could not possibly appear.



And only at midnight, when the heralds for the last time announced his victory, Nicholas of Dlangolias called him to supper, and then to the prince's council.

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## CHAPTER X.

At the council the prince spoke first.

"What a pity that there is no letter or any other evidence against the Commander. Although our suspicions are just, and I myself think that they and no one else stole Yurand's daughter, yet what can we do? The Crusaders will deny it. And if the Magister should demand proof, what will we show him? Besides, the letter of Yurand exonerates them."

Then he turned to Zbishko.

"You say that the letter was obtained from him by threat. Very likely it is as you say, for if justice were not on your side, the Lord would not have helped you against Rotger. But since they extorted one, they can extort another. They may even now have a letter of Yurand in their hands, testifying to their innocence. What if they show it to the Magister?"

"But they themselves admitted, gracious lord, that they had rescued Danusia from highwaymen."

"I know that; but now they say that they were mistaken."

"Their falsehood is like a forest," said Nicholas. "Something can be seen on the edge, but the deeper one goes the denser it becomes and one loses all tracks."

He translated his words into German for the benefit of De Lorche, who said:

"The Grand Magister is better than they, and his brother has the soul of a knight, though he is insolent."

"That is true," answered Nicholas; "the Magister is a kind man, but he cannot restrain the Commanders, nor the Chapters; he cannot remove the injustices of the Order, but does not rejoice at them. You go to him, De Lorche, and tell him everything that happened. They are more ashamed before strangers than before us, when their treacheries and crimes become known, especially at the foreign courts. And if the Magister should demand proof, tell him this: 'To know the truth is a divine attribute; for man it is to seek it: and if you desire proof, look for it. Let all castles be searched, the people questioned. Permit us also to seek, because it is stuff and nonsense that they rescued the girl from highwaymen.'"

"Stuff and nonsense," repeated De Lorche.

"Highwaymen would not raise their hands against a prince's court, against the daughter of Yurand. And even if they had stolen her, it would have been for a ransom, and they would have notified us themselves that they held her."

"I will tell him all that, and will find De Bergan," said the Lotharingian. "We are from the same country, and though I don't know him, they say that he is some relative of Count Heldern. He was at Stchitna; let him tell the Magister what he saw."

Zbishko understood part of these words, and when the rest was explained to him by Nicholas, he embraced De Lorche so that the latter began to moan.

"You have decided to go?" asked the prince, addressing Zbishko.

"I have decided, gracious lord. What else am I to do? I intended to take Stchitna, but I cannot begin war without permission."

"Whoever begins war without permission will repent under the headsman's axe," said the prince.

"Of course, law is law," answered Zbishko. "I meant to challenge to single combat every one that was present at Stchitna, but they say that Yurand had killed them all like wolves, and I don't know who is dead and who is alive. But I swear, by God and the Holy Cross, that I shall not desert Yurand as long as he lives!"

"You have said well, and I like your words," said Nicholas of Dlugolias. "And that you did not rush to Stchitna shows your good sense, although even a fool would understand that they kept neither Yurand nor his daughter there, and that they must have removed them to some other castle. And for you coming here, God has aided you in your contest with Rotger."

"Yes," said the prince, "and from Rotger we know that of all four Siegfried alone is alive; the others God has chastised through the hand of Yurand. As to Siegfried, he is more honest, although perhaps more cruel, than the others. The trouble is that Yurand and Danusia are in his hands, and they must be saved as soon as possible. But that nothing may happen to you, I will give you a letter to the Magister. But listen; you must understand that you are not going as an envoy, but as a messenger, and this is what I write in the letter: 'Since they have made an attempt on our person, the descendant of their benefactors, it is also possible that they have stolen Yurand's daughter, as they nursed a special hatred against Yurand.' I am asking him to order a search to be made for

her, and if he wishes my friendship he should immediately deliver her to me."

Hearing which Zbishko threw himself at the feet of the prince and, embracing his knees, said:

"And Yurand, gracious lord—and Yurand? Intercede for him! If his wounds are fatal, let him die, at least, in his house, among his children."

"There is also something about Yurand," said the prince. "The Magister must send two of his judges, and I will send two, and they will judge the affair by the laws of chivalry. The four will choose a fifth one, and what they will decide will be done."

And there the consultation ended. Zbishko took leave of the prince, as he calculated on starting at once.

But the experienced Nicholas, who knew the Crusaders, took him aside and asked:

"Will you also take that Czech with you?"

"Of course I will take him, for he would not leave me. Why?"

"I am sorry for him. He is a fine fellow. Consider what I will tell you: If you do not fight some one at Malborg more skillful than yourself, you will return hale and hearty, of course, but the Czech will surely perish there."

"Why?"

"Because these dogs have accused the Czech of killing De Fursi. They must have written to the Magister, and have, of course, thrown all blame upon him. That would not be forgiven him in Malborg. A trial and revenge await him there, for how will you prove his innocence? Besides, he broke Danefeldt's arm, and Danefeldt was a relative of the Grand Hospitaler. I am sorry for him; but I repeat that if he goes it will be to certain death."

"I shall not take him to certain death; I will leave him at Spichow."

But it happened otherwise; there were circumstances which prevented the Czech from staying at Spichow. Zbishko and De Lorche left the following day with their servants. De Lorche, whom Wyshonok had released from all obligations toward Ullricha de Ellner, was happy and entirely absorbed by dreams of the beauty of Yagenka of Dlugolias. Zbishko conversed with Glawa, who was still in ignorance of the proposed trip to the land of the Crusaders.

"I am going to Malborg," said Zbishko, "but Heaven knows when I will return. It may be soon, and it may be only in

the spring, or in a year, or perhaps never—do you understand?”

“I understand. Your grace is probably going to fight the German knights. And praise to the Lord, for every knight has his armiger.”

“No,” answered Zbishko. “I am not going to fight the knights unless it happens against my will; and you will not go at all; you will remain at home, in Spichow.”

The Czech was very much grieved and began to implore the young master not to leave him.

“I have sworn not to leave your grace; I have sworn on the Cross and on my honor. If some ill should befall you, how could I look in the face of my mistress of Zzojheltzi? I have sworn to her! Have mercy on me, that I may not disgrace myself before her.”

“And have you not sworn to obey me?” asked Zbishko.

“Of course; I have sworn to obey you in everything, but not that I would leave you. If you drive me from you, I will follow you at a distance, so that in case of necessity I will be at your side.”

“I am not driving you from me, and will not do so,” said Zbishko; “but it would be a misfortune if I could not send you away ever so far, or could not free myself from you even for one day. You do not intend to stand constantly over me, like a headsman over a criminal! And how can you help me in a single combat? I am not speaking of war, when people fight in masses, but of a duel. You could not fight for me. If Rotger had been stronger than I, we would not have his accoutrements on our wagon, but he would have mine on his. Besides, you must know that it would be dangerous to have you with me there.”

“How so, your grace?”

Zbishko explained to him what he had heard from Nicholas of Dlugolias. The Commanders could not admit killing De Fursi; hence they accused him of the crime, and would persecute him with their revenge.

“And if they should seize you,” he concluded, “I could not leave you like a bone in the jaws of a wolf, and that might cost me my life.”

Hearing these words, the Czech became gloomy. He thoroughly understood their soundness, but he continued to persist.

“But those that saw me are not among the living; one of them was killed, they say, by the old master of Spichow; and you killed Rotger.”

“You were seen by the servants who followed them. Besides,

that old Crusader is alive, and is probably in Malborg now; and if not there now, is likely to be called there by the Magister."

The Czech could find no answer to this, and silently rode to Spichow. Everything there was ready for war; old Tulina thought that either the Crusaders would attack the town, or that Zbishko, on his return, would lead them to the rescue of Yurand. Hence, guards were stationed on the roads leading across the bogs and in the town itself. Kaleb received Zbishko and De Lorche in the castle, and immediately after the supper showed them the parchment, with Yurand's seal, on which was written the last will of the Spichow knight.

"He dictated it on the night when he left Spichow," said the priest. "Apparently he did not expect to return."

"Why did you not tell me that?"

"Because he confided to me his intentions in the confessional. May his soul repose among the blessed!"

"Don't pray for him yet; he is alive. I know it from Rotger, with whom I fought at the prince's court. We had a trial by combat, and I killed him."

"Therefore the more certain it is that Yurand will not return. The only hope is in the might of God."

"I am going with this knight to rescue him from their hands."

"Then you don't know their hands, but I do. Before Yurand sheltered me in Spichow, I was for fifteen years a priest in their country. Yurand can be saved by God alone."

"God may help us also."

"Amen!"

The priest Kaleb unrolled the parchment and began to read it. By it Yurand devised all his lands and goods to Danusia and her posterity, and, in case of her childlessness, to Zbishko of Bogdanetz. In conclusion he appealed to the prince for protection: "And if anything written here is not according to law, then let the prince's kindness make it law." This was added because Kaleb was strong only in canonical law; and Yurand, eternally at war, only knew the laws of chivalry. After this the priest read the document to the servants, who swore allegiance to the young master.

They thought that Zbishko would immediately lead them to the rescue of the old master and rejoiced, for many hearts beat in their breasts, and they were attached to Yurand. They were chagrined when they learned that they were to remain at home, and that Zbishko was to go to Malborg with a small retinue, and not to fight, but to complain. This chagrin was

shared also by the Czech, although, on the other hand, he rejoiced in the increase of Zbishko's fortune.

"How happy the old master of Bogdanetz would be!" he said. "What is Bogdanetz in comparison with Spichow!"

Zbishko began to long for his uncle, as he often did, especially in perplexing moments, and turning to the Czech he said almost without thinking:

"Why should you stay here unnecessarily? Go to Bogdanetz; you will take my letter there."

"If I cannot go with you, of course I would prefer to go there," he said with delight.

"Call the priest Kaleb; he will write down everything that has happened here; and the abbot, if he is at Zgojhelitzl, will read it to uncle."

Saying which he struck his lips with his fingers, and said, as if to himself:

"Yes, the abbot!"

And before his eyes flashed Yagenka, blue-eyed, dark-haired, as beautiful as a roe, with tears trembling on her eyelashes. And he felt so bad that for a long time he rubbed his forehead with his hand, and finally said:

"You will be sad, girl, but no more so than I!" Meanwhile Kaleb came and began to write. Zbishko dictated in detail everything that had happened from the moment of his arrival at the forest castle. He concealed nothing, knowing that upon consideration old Matzko would be glad himself.

And, really, Bogdanetz could not compare with Spichow, and Matzko was a great lover of these things.

When, after great labor, the letter was finally written, Zbishko again called his armiger, and said:

"Maybe you will come here with uncle; I should be very glad."

The Czech was agitated in every limb. He rested now on one foot, now on the other, and he did not leave until the young knight said:

"Have you anything else to say?"

"I, your grace? I would like to ask you, what shall I tell the people there?"

"What people?"

"Not in Bogdanetz—no—but those in the neighborhood. Of course, they will wish to know everything."

Zbishko, who had already decided to conceal nothing, searchingly looked at him and answered:

"You don't mean the people—you mean Yagenka." The Czech's face lit up, then suddenly turned pale and said:

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know that she has not married Wolk or Tshetzlas?"

"The young lady has not married," said the Czech, with decision.

"The abbot might have ordered her to marry."

"The abbot obeys her, not she him."

"What do you want, then? Tell them the truth—her and every one else."

The Czech bowed and left, somewhat angered.

"May God grant her to forget you," he thought of Zbishko. "May God send her a better man than you. But if she has not forgotten you, then I will tell her that you are married, but without a wife, and that you will sooner become a widower than lead her to the bridal chamber."

The Czech, however, had become attached to Zbishko, and was sorry for Danusia; but he loved Yagenka more than any one else in the world, and ever since he had learned of Zbishko's marriage he bore grief in his heart.

Meanwhile Zbishko yearned to be on the road, and when not occupied with other affairs suffered at the thought of Danusia and Yurand. But it was necessary to stay at Spichow at least a day, for the sake of De Lorche, and to make the preparations required by such a long journey. Zbishko himself was fatigued beyond all measure from the combat, sleeplessness and sorrows, and when evening came he threw himself on Yurand's hard couch, with the hope of falling asleep, when Sanderus entered the room, and, bowing, said:

"Master, you saved my life, and I never was so well off as when I was with you. And now God has sent you a larger village; you are rich now, and the Spichow treasury is not empty. Give me some money, and I will go to Prussia, where I will travel from castle to castle, and though it is dangerous there for me now, I shall be of service to you."

Zbishko at first intended to throw him out of the room, then considered his words, and, taking a large purse of money from his traveling-bag, threw it to Sanderus.

"Take it and go. If you are a rogue, you will laugh at me; if you are a good man, you will return it, with good wishes and good treatment."

"I shall laugh like a rogue, master," said Sanderus, "but not at you; and, like a good man, I shall repay you with good deeds."

## CHAPTER XI.

Siegfried de Loewe was on the point of departing for Malborg when a postillion brought him a letter from Rotger, describing the events that had transpired at the Mazovian court.

These events stirred the old Crusader to the depth of his soul. From the letter it was seen that Rotger properly represented the Yurand affair to Prince Yanoush. Siegfried smiled when he read that Rotger even demanded Spichow as a reward for the losses of the Order, but the other part of the letter contained unexpected and less pleasant news. Rotger also informed him that in proof that the Order was innocent of the stealing of the daughter of Yurand, he threw his glove at the Mazovian knight, challenging to trial by combat any one that doubted his statement—that is, to single combat before the whole court.

"No one picked up the glove," Rotger wrote; "every one knew that the letter of Yurand himself spoke in our favor; they all feared the judgment of God. But suddenly that brat whom we saw at the forest castle declared himself the husband of Yurand's daughter, and accepted my challenge. Do not be surprised, pious and wise brother, if I am late in returning, for having given the challenge, I must fight him who accepted it. And since I did it for the glory of the Order, I hope that neither the Grand Magister nor you, whom I love and honor with a filial heart, will blame me for it. My adversary is almost a child, and you know that I am no novice in battle, and I shall easily spill his blood to the glory of the Order, especially with the aid of God, who apparently cares more for those that wear His cross than for some Yurand or the misfortune of some insignificant Mazovian hussy."

Siegfried was surprised, first of all, to hear that Yurand's daughter was married. The old Commander was even somewhat alarmed, fearing that some new and terrible foe might settle in Spichow.

"He will probably never cease to wreak his vengeance," he thought, "especially when he discovers his wife, and she tells him that we abducted her from the forest castle. Yes, it would soon be discovered that we had decoyed Yurand in order to destroy him, and that we never intended to return his child."

Here it occurred to him that the Magister would in all likelihood institute a search at Stchitna, if only to exculpate him-



self before that same prince, for it was very important for the Magister as well as the Chapter that in case of war with the Polish king the Mazovian princes should remain neutral. The Mazovian knighthood was numerous and courageous; the forces of the princes could not be treated lightly; and a peaceful alliance with them assured to the Order an extensive frontier, which made it possible for the Order to distribute its army as it pleased. It was often the subject of conversation in Malborg; the Crusaders often consoled themselves with the hope that after a victory over the king they would find a pretext for a quarrel with Mazovia; and in that case no power could wrest that country from the hands of the Crusaders. The calculation was both important and correct; wherefore it appeared but reasonable that the Magister should do everything to allay the invitation of Prince Yanoush, because it would be harder to win over the ruler who was married to the daughter of Keistut than Zemowit of Platzk, whose wife was, for unknown reasons, entirely devoted to the Order.

At these thoughts old Siegfried began to consult his conscience. Notwithstanding his readiness for any crime, his treachery and ferocity, he nevertheless loved the Order and its glory.

"Would it not be better to release Yurand and his daughter? Treachery and disgrace would fall on the name of Danefeldt, but he is dead. And even if the Grand Magister should sternly punish me and Rotger—for we did help Danefeldt—would it not be better for the Order?" But here his vengeful and ferocious heart became agitated at the very thought of Yurand.

To release that persecutor and executioner of the Order's people, the conqueror in so many battles, the cause of such disgrace, the murderer of Danefeldt, Meineger, Gottfried and Hugh—to free him who had shed more German blood in Stchitna than was shed in a battle in time of war!

"I cannot, I cannot!" Siegfried repeated in his soul; and at that very thought his claws bent convulsively, and his breath failed his old, withered breast. And besides, would it bring any advantage or glory to the Order? There was not even the assurance that the punishment that would fall, in that case, on the living participants in the crime would even appease the heretofore hostile Prince Yanoush and win him over to an alliance with the Crusaders.

"They are irascible," thought the old Crusader; "but if one is kind to them, they forget their wrongs. We seized the prince in his own country, yet he did not avenge the wrong."

He began to pace the hall in great agitation, and finally halted before a crucifix which occupied the entire wall between the two windows opposite the main entrance, knelt and said:

"Enlighten me, Oh Lord! Teach me what to do! If I release Yurand and his daughter, our deeds will be disclosed in all their nakedness, and people will not say: 'That was done by Danefeldt or Siegfried,' but will say, 'The Crusaders,' and the infamy may fall upon the entire Order, therefore Yanoush's hatred toward us will only increase. If I do not release them, and conceal or kill them, a shadow of suspicion will still rest on the Order, and I must pollute my lips with falsehood before the Magister. What is best, Oh Lord? Teach me, enlighten me! If revenge possessed me, judge me later according to Thy justice; but now teach and enlighten me, for it is not I who suffer, but the Order; and what Thou commandest I will do, even if I had to await death and release chained in an underground dungeon."

And he fell with his head at the foot of the crucifix, but the thought never entered his head that the prayer was false and blasphemous. He arose somewhat calmed, supposing that the grace of the wooden crucifix had sent him an enlightened thought, and that something from above spake:

"Rise and wait for the return of Rotger."

"Yes, it was necessary to wait! Rotger would, of course, kill that brat, and then it will be necessary either to conceal Yurand and his daughter or release them. True, in the first case, the prince would not forget them; but, not being perfectly certain who had stolen the girl, he would search for her, and send letters to the Magister, not with accusations, but with questions, and the affair would drag indefinitely. In the other case, the joy over Yurand's return would be greater than the desire to avenge her abduction. And, finally, they could say that she had been found only after Yurand's attack. This last thought entirely calmed Siegfried. And as for Yurand, the old knight, together with Rotger, had long ago discovered a plan to deprive him not only of his ability to secure revenge, but even to complain.

The cruel soul of Siegfried rejoiced as he thought of the plan. He also rejoiced as he anticipated the result of the combat in the court-yard of the Tzchanow castle. He felt not the slightest uneasiness about it. He recalled that at a tournament at Krolevtzo, Rotger had vanquished two famous knights who had been considered unconquerable in their own country. He also recalled a combat at Wilno, with a nobleman, Spitko of Melshtin; and Siegfried's face brightened and his

heart was filled with pride because he himself had led Rotger—then already a famous knight—in an attack on Lithuania, and taught him the best methods of fighting that people. And then he began to love him like a son, with a love of which only those are capable who are compelled to stifle in their breast the power and desire to love. And now his son would shed again the hateful Polish blood, and would return surrounded with glory. At the same time it was also the judgment of God, and the Order would be free from all suspicion.

The judgment of God! For just one moment a feeling akin to alarm seized the old heart. Rotger must enter the fatal combat in defense of the innocence of the Crusaders, and yet the guilt was all on their side; consequently he must fight for falsehood. And what if some misfortune should happen? But he immediately dismissed the idea as being impossible.

Yes, Rotger truly writes that "Christ apparently cares more for those who wear His cross than for some Yurand, or the misfortune of some Mazovian hussy." Yes, yes, in three days Rotger would return, and would return victorious.

Having thus reassured himself, the old Crusader began to consider the advisability of sending Danusia immediately to some remote castle which was beyond the reach of the Mazovii, but dismissed this thought. To arrange and lead an attack only the husband of Yurand's daughter could undertake; but he was already doomed to perish by the hand of Rotger. Then the prince and princess would make inquiries, send letters and complaints; but these very things would make matters involved and confused, and also cause an indefinite delay.

"Before any result is reached," he said to himself, "I will be dead and Yurand's daughter may get old in the dungeon."

However, he ordered the castle to be prepared for defense, and also instructed his adherents to be ready to start at short notice, for he did not know himself how his consultation with Rotger would end. And he waited.

After the expiration of the time set by Rotger himself for his return, two days passed, and a third, and a fourth, but no detachment appeared at the Stchitna gate. Only on the fifth day, toward evening, sounds of a trumpet were heard before the gate-keeper's tower.

Siegfried, who had just finished his prayer, sent a servant to see who had arrived.

The servant soon returned, with agitation depicted in his face; but Siegfried could not see the agitation, for the fire

in the deep hearth was already low, and barely lit up the room.

"Have they arrived?" asked the old knight.

"Yes," answered the boy.

But there was something in his voice that at once alarmed the Crusader, and he asked again:

"And Brother Rotger?"

"Brother Rotger was also brought."

Siegfried rose from his arm-chair. For a long time he leaned on the arms of the chair, as if he feared to fall, then spoke in a choked voice:

"Give me my cloak."

The servant threw the cloak on his shoulders, while Siegfried summoned his strength, for he himself put on the hood, and left the room.

He was soon in the dark court of the castle, and with slow step walked over the crispy snow, to the detachment, which, passing the gate, had halted not far from it. There stood a dense little crowd of people, lighted by a few torches, which had been brought by the soldiers of the garrison. The *knechte* seeing the old knight, made way for him. By the glare of the torches only alarmed faces were seen; suppressed exclamations were heard in the dark:

"Brother Rotger——"

"Brother Rotger is killed!"

Siegfried approached the sledge on which lay the body, covered with a cloak. Raising one corner, he said, while he threw back his hood:

"Some light!"

One of the servants lowered a torch, by the light of which the old Crusader saw Rotger's head and face, as white as snow, rigid, framed in a dark kerchief which was tied under his chin, apparently to keep the mouth from opening. The entire face of Rotger had become so emaciated and changed that it was almost unrecognizable. Around his eyes, covered by the eyelashes, and on his temples were blue spots, and on his cheeks was a glossy layer of hoar-frost.

The Commander stood a long time amid general silence. Everybody looked with sympathy at him; every one knew of his fatherly love for the deceased. But not a tear came from his eyes; only his face became more stern and he seemed more tranquil than usual.

"This is how they have returned him!" he finally said; then turned to the steward of the castle:

"Let a coffin be made by midnight and the body placed in the chapel."

"Of the coffins made for those killed by Yurand there is one left," answered the steward. "I will have it lined with cloth."

"And covered with a cloak," said Siegfried, dropping the corner of the cloak over Rotger's face; "not like this one, but with one of the Order."

After a short pause he added:

"And do not nail down the lid."

The servants of the castle approached the sledge; Siegfried pulled the hood over his eyes, but before departing he apparently recalled something, for he suddenly stopped and asked:

"And where is Von Krist?"

"Also killed," answered one of the servants, "but we had to bury him at Tzechanow, for his body began to decay."

"That is good."

Then he slowly departed, and, returning to the hall, seated himself in the same chair in which he had received the terrible news. He sat there with stony, immovable face so long that the boy-servant became more and more alarmed, and often thrust his head in the door. The hours were fleeting, the usual stir in the castle was dying away; only the dull, indistinct strokes of a hammer were heard coming from the chapel, and the calls of the guard rang out in the peaceful night.

It was near midnight when the old knight awoke, as if from sleep, and called the servant.

"Where is Brother Rotger?" he asked.

But the boy, confused by the silence, the terrible event and a sleepless night, did not, apparently, understand the question. He looked at Siegfried with alarm and in a trembling voice answered:

"I don't know, sir."

But the old man said gently, with a harrowing smile:

"Child, I am asking if he is in the chapel."

"Yes, sir."

"Good! Tell Diederich to come here with a torch, and wait till I return. Let him also bring a kettle with coals. Is there light in the chapel?"

"There are candles burning around the coffin."

Siegfried took his cloak and left the room.

On the threshold of the chapel he looked around to see that there was no one present, carefully locked the door, ap-

proached the coffin, left two of the six candles burning, and fell on his knees.

His lips did not move; he did not pray; he only looked at the cold, still beautiful face of Rotger as if wishing to discover signs of life.

Suddenly, in the quiet of the chapel, he began to call in a low voice:

"My child! my child!"

And he became silent. It seemed as if he was waiting for an answer.

Then, stretching his hand, he thrust his thin fingers, resembling the claws of a bird of prey, under the cloak that covered Rotger's breast and began to feel it; he felt everywhere—in the middle, at the sides, below the ribs, near the collar-bone, and finally through the cloth he felt a gash extending from the top of the right shoulder to the very groin. He thrust his fingers into the wound, felt along its entire length, and said in a lamenting voice:

"Oh, what a merciless blow! And you said that he was a mere child! The entire shoulder—the entire shoulder! How many times has it served you to raise a weapon in defense of the Order! And now it is severed by a Polish axe! What a finish! You have reached your limit! Christ did not bless you. The wrong of one man seems to be of more importance to Him than our entire Order. I swear by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost that it was not a just cause that you defended; you have fallen for the sake of falsehood, and without repenting——"

His voice failed him, his lips began to tremble, and a deep silence followed.

"My child! my child!"

His voice was now full of entreaty. He spoke still lower, as when one is asking about some grave and terrible secret.

"Merciful Christ! My boy, if you have not been condemned to eternal torment, make some sign—move your hand or open your eye but for a moment, for my heart walls in the old breast—make some sign. I loved you so—Speak!"

And, leaning his hands on the edge of the coffin, he turned his hawk eyes to Rotger's eyelashes and waited.

"Ah, how can you answer," he said at last, "when you are cold and putrescent. But if you are silent, then I will tell you something, and let your soul descend between these two burning candles and listen."

With these words he bent over the face of the corpse.

"You remember that the chaplain did not permit the killing

of Yurand, and what vow we took? Very well. I will fulfill the vow, and give you joy wherever you may be, even if I am subjected to eternal torment."

He stepped back from the coffin, replaced the two candles, covered the corpse with the cloak, and left the chapel.

At the hall-door the boy-servant slept and in the room Diederich was waiting for the orders of Siegfried.

Diederich was a small, strong man, bow-legged, and with a square face, which was partly hidden by the hood tapering down on his shoulders. His body was covered with a coat of raw buffalo skin, with a similar belt around his hips, from which hung a bundle of keys and a short knife. In his right hand he held a dark lantern—in his left, a copper kettle and a torch.

"Are you ready?" asked Siegfried.

Diederich nodded silently.

"I ordered you to have coals in the kettle." Diederich was silent again, but approached the hearth, and with a small iron shovel standing nearby filled the kettle with coals, lighted the lantern, and waited.

"And now listen, you cur!" said Siegfried. "You once permitted yourself to give out what Danefeldt commanded you to do, and the Commander ordered that your tongue be cut out. But you can tell the chaplain everything by sign. Now I warn you, that if you tell him, by even a single sign, what you did at my command, I shall have you hanged!"

Diederich again nodded silently, only his face became ominously distorted at the terrible recollection. His tongue had been cut out for a different reason than the one mentioned by Siegfried.

"Lead me to Yurand's dungeon."

The executioner lifted the kettle with his gigantic hand, took the lantern, and together with Siegfried left the hall. They directed their steps, not toward the main door, but toward a narrow gallery which ran along the entire building, and ended at an iron gate, hidden in the niche of the wall.

Diederich opened it, and again they appeared under the open sky, in a small court, surrounded by strong storehouses, which contained stores of grain to be used in case of a siege of the castle. Under one of these storehouses, on the right, were the dungeons for prisoners. There was no guard, because even if a prisoner escaped from the dungeon, he would find himself in the court, from which the iron gate was the only exit.

"Wait!" said Siegfried.

And leaning his hand against the wall, he stopped, for he felt something happening to him, his breath failing him, as if his breast were locked in a tight iron cuirass. Naturally enough, all that he had experienced was beyond his failing strength; he felt that his forehead was covered with cold perspiration, and decided to rest awhile.

Serene night followed the gloomy day. The moon shone in the sky, and the entire court was lit up by its rays. Siegfried drew in the cool air with avidity. But he immediately recalled that on such a bright night Rotger had departed, and he had returned a corpse.

"And now you are lying in the chapel," he said in a low voice.

Diederich, thinking that the Commander was speaking to him, raised his lantern and lit up Siegfried's face, which was terribly, almost deathly pale, but at the same time cruel and ferocious.

"Lead on!" said Siegfried.

They proceeded, followed by the flickering, yellow light of the lantern.

In the thick wall of the storehouse another iron door was fastened in a niche. Diederich opened it and began to descend the stairway leading into the deep, yawning, dark jaws of the dungeon, holding aloft the lantern to light the way for the Commander. At the foot of the stairway was seen a gallery, on both sides of which were chambers containing prisoners.

"To Yurand!" said Siegfried.

The hinges of one of the chambers creaked, but the pit was so dark that Siegfried ordered a torch to be lighted, and with the aid of the strong glare thrown by it he saw Yurand lying on a couch of hay.

The feet of the prisoner were in fetters, and on his hands was a chain which just permitted him to raise food to his mouth. He wore the same hempen sack in which he had stood before the Commander, but now there were dark blood-spots on it. With a shudder Siegfried recalled that memorable day, when the Stchitna battle terminated only when Yurand, almost insane from pain and frenzy, had been entailed in a net. The servants had intended to dispatch him, and had inflicted on him some wounds with halberds. The chaplain of Stchitna had interfered; the wounds were not fatal, but Yurand had lost so much blood that he was half dead when taken to the pit. The people thought that he could not live long, but his gigantic strength overcame death, although he was thrown into a terrible dungeon, wherein drops of moisture



were falling from the ceiling in the day, while at night, and especially when it was cold, the walls were covered with a thick layer of rime and ice crystals.

And there he lay on the hay, fettered, powerless, but so huge that he resembled a fragment of a cliff hewn into a human figure.

Siegfried directed that the light be thrown on his face, and for some minutes he silently looked into his face, then turned to Diederich and said:

"You see, he has but one eye—scorch it." /

There was a languidness and impotence in his voice, but it may be that for that very reason the terrible command seemed even more terrible.

The torch at first slightly trembled in the hand of the executioner, nevertheless he lowered it, and large, burning drops of pitch were soon falling on Yurand's eye and finally covered it from the brows to the cheek-bones.

Yurand's face became distorted, his flaxen mustache curled up, disclosing clenched teeth, but he spoke not a word, and whether from faintness or stubbornness, that had become part of his terrible nature, he uttered not a groan.

And Siegfried said:

"We promised to set you free. You will be set free, but you will not accuse the Order any more, for the tongue that has uttered blasphemies against it will be torn out."

And he again beckoned to Diederich, but the executioner uttered a strange, guttural sound, and by gestures indicated that he must have both hands free, and that the Commander should hold the torch. Then the old man took the torch with his trembling hand, but turned his head to the rime-covered walls when Diederich pressed with his knees the breast of Yurand.

During the following few minutes in the dungeon were heard the clanking of chains, the quick breathing of a human breast, and something like a dull, deep moan, then all became quiet.

Finally, the voice of Siegfried was heard again:

"Yurand, the chastisement which you have undergone you could not have escaped, but I have also promised Rotger, who has been killed by your daughter's husband, that I would place your arm in his coffin."

Diederich, who had raised himself on hearing these words, again bent over Yurand.

In a little while the old Commander and Diederich again appeared in the court, which was flooded with the green light of the moon. Passing the gallery, Siegfried took from the hands

of the executioner the lantern and some dark parcel wrapped in a cloth, and loudly said to himself:

"Now to the chapel, and then to the tower." Diederich looked at him penetratingly, but the Commander ordered him to go to sleep, while he himself, swinging the lantern, dragged himself to the chapel, in the direction of the lighted windows. He felt some certainty that his own end was approaching, and that those were his last deeds for which he would have to answer to God alone. At the same time, his soul, naturally more cruel than false, under the influence of inexorable necessity, became so accustomed to subterfuges, cunning, and constantly justifying the bloody crimes of the Order, that he could shift the responsibility for the torture of Yurand as well from himself as from the Order.

Diederich was dumb, and though he could by means of signs explain something to the chaplain, he would be afraid to do so. What else? Who could know that Yurand had not received the wounds in battle? A spear could easily have struck his mouth; a sword or axe could have severed his arm, and his eye might have been destroyed when he insanely attacked the entire Stchitna garrison.

Ah, Yurand! The last joy of life for a moment made the heart of the old Crusader shrink. Yes, if he survived all that he would be released. Here Siegfried recalled that he once held a consultation with Rotger, at which the young brother said, laughing: "Then let him go *wherever his eyes will take him*, and if he does not find his way, let him *inquire* for the way to Spichow." And that which happened had already been decided upon between them. But now, when Siegfried again entered the chapel, and placed Yurand's arm at the feet of Rotger, this last joy, which but a moment ago agitated his heart, was now for the last time reflected on his face.

"You see," he said. "I did more than we agreed to do. King Joan of Luxemburg went into combat, although he was blind, and then died in glory; but Yurand will never enter another combat, and will perish like a dog!"

And again he felt his breath failing him, as when he was on his way to Yurand's dungeon he felt his head oppressed as if by an iron helmet. But his weakness only lasted a moment. Siegfried took a long breath and said:

"Ah, my time has arrived. You were my only one; now I am alone. But if it is given me to live, I promise you, my son, that I will place on your coffin that arm which killed you, or I will perish myself. Your murderer is still alive."

His teeth clenched, a convulsive tremor ran through his

body, his speech was cut short, and only after a long pause he spoke in a broken voice:

"Yes, your murderer is still alive, but I will find him—and before I find him I will subject him to a torture more terrible than death." Then he became silent.

In a moment he rose, approached the coffin, and said in a calm voice:

"Well, let us part. For the last time I will look at your face. I may, perhaps, see if you are gladdened by my promise. For the last time!"

He uncovered Rotger's face, but immediately stepped back.

"You laugh," he said, "but how horrible your laughter——"

The body was thawing, on account of the cloak and the close proximity of the candles, and was beginning to decompose rapidly. The face of the young man was really horrible. His blue lips were distorted into some sort of smile.

Siegfried quickly covered that horrible face with the cloak.

He then took the lantern and left the chapel. On the way he for the third time felt his breath failing him; and returning to his room he threw himself on his hard couch and lay there motionless for some time. He hoped to be able to fall asleep, when a stranger feeling seized him. It seemed to him that sleep would never return to him, but that if he remained in that room death would immediately come to him.

Siegfried feared not death. In his present extreme weariness, without hope of sleeping, he saw in death desirable repose; but he would not yield that night, and seating himself on his couch, he said:

"Give me time till to-morrow."

At that moment he heard distinctly a voice speaking into his ear:

"Leave this room. To-morrow it will be too late to do what you have promised. Leave this room!"

The Commander with difficulty raised himself and walked out. On the ramparts and towers the guards called one another. From the windows of the chapel a yellowish light fell on the snow. In the middle of the court, near the stone well, two black dogs played with a piece of rag. Otherwise the court was dark and deserted.

"So it must be to-night?" said Siegfried. "Ah, how tired I am; but I am going. They are all asleep. Yurand, fatigued with the torture, is, perhaps, also asleep. Only I will be awake. I am going, going, for there is death in that room, and I promised you——. Afterwards let death come, if sleep does not come. You are laughing, while I have no strength. You

are laughing, you are content, you are rejoicing—But you see—my fingers are rigid, my hands are powerless—I could not do it myself—The sister will—She is sleeping with her.”

One of the dogs, fawning on the Commander, barked a couple of times, then turned and ran to the gate, as if scenting the man's thought.

Siegfried soon found himself before the narrow doors of the tower, which for the night were fastened from without. Drawing the bolt, he felt for the handrail which ran from the foot of the stairs, and began to climb up. His thoughts were so confused that he forgot to take the lantern, and walked at random, stepping carefully and feeling with his foot every step.

After ascending a few steps, he suddenly halted, for he heard above him the snoring of a beast or a man.

“Who is there?”

There was no answer, only the snoring became more frequent.

Siegfried was a fearless man. He did not fear even death, but his daring and self-possession had been severely taxed during that terrible night. The thought flashed through his brain that it might be Rotger barring his way, or, perhaps, the evil spirit, and the hair on his head stood on end, and cold perspiration covered his forehead.

He stepped back almost to the very door.

“Who is there?” he asked again in a choked voice.

But at the same moment something struck his chest with such force that the old man fainted and fell on his back in the open door without uttering a sound.

Silence reigned. Then a dark figure came from the tower, and darted to the stables on the left of the court. Diederich's large Milan dog silently followed it; the other dog also followed, and was soon hidden in the shadow of the wall. He then returned with lowered head, running here and there, as if looking for a trail.

He thus approached the prostrate Siegfried, carefully sniffed all over him, and, finally, seating himself beside the Commander, raised his head and began to howl.

The howling of the dog lasted long, and seemingly filled the terrible night with new grief and alarm. Finally the door hidden in the depth of the larger gateway began to creak, and the gatekeeper appeared with halbred in hand.

“The devil take you!” he said. “I will teach you to be silent at night!”

And he was about to pierce the dog with the point of the halberd, when he saw some one lying in the open door of the tower.

"Herr Jesus! What is that!"

He bent over, looked into the face of the prostrate man, and began to shout:

"Help! Help!"

Then he ran toward the tower and began to pull the bell-rope with all his might.

END OF BOOK FOUR.













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